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April 2016 | Issue 211

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Doëlan fishing port, Clohars-Carnoët,
Finistère

Artistic inspiration

Now France is warming up under the spring sunshine, you can start to get excited about the many wonderful things to do across the Channel and this issue will guide you to many of them.

It's a great time to take a road trip in France and with this year's Impressionist Festival, Normandy should be on your itinerary. With many different exhibitions and events taking place across the region between April and September, you will be spoilt for choice on what to attend. Of course, the events are in addition to the already existing sites that once inspired the likes of Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro and Eugène Boudin among others. I took a trip around some of the most famous locations, from Giverny to Étretat, as well as some excellent galleries, and it was wonderful to see the region through artists' eyes.

Another of our features this month is also centred around France through artists' eyes, albeit a completely different style. Last summer, caricaturists Simon and Sheba Cassini cycled the *Vélodyssée* route down the Atlantic coast and drew cartoons of their journey as they went. Their humorous and touching account of the trip is on page 54.

If you're making a long journey yourself soon, then let our guide to the best hotels either near the ferry ports, St Pancras Eurostar terminal or near Charles de Gaulle airport help you plan your journey.

Finally, if you enjoy reading *FRANCE Magazine*, why not recommend it to a France-loving friend? Just turn to page 32 for our fantastic subscription offer and share your passion for France.

Until next time, *à bientôt* and *bon voyage*!



Carolyn
Carolyn Boyd
Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

Simon and Sheba Cassini

London caricaturists Sheba and Simon usually put pen to paper for corporate events, parties and festivals but last summer they recorded their 1,200-kilometre bike ride down the west coast of France. Their story is on page 54.



Jon Bryant

Jon has been a journalist for almost 20 years and teaches journalism at the École du Journalisme in Nice, where he now lives with his family. On page 86, he susses out some of the best places to eat in Cannes.



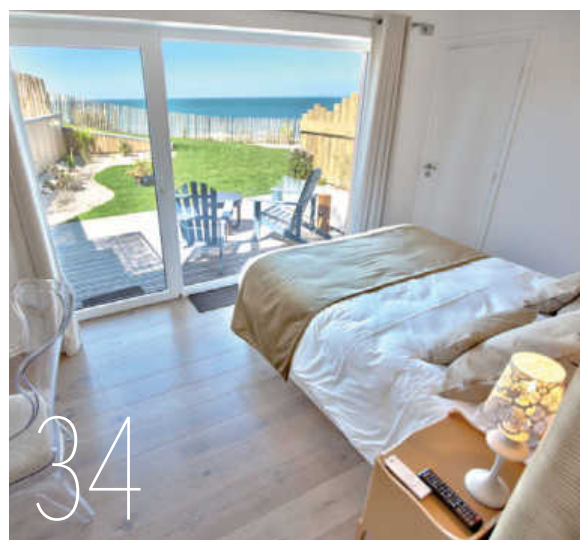
Paul Miles

Paul writes regular pieces for *The Financial Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. When he's not on his narrow boat cruising the waterways of England and Wales, Paul loves to slow travel around Europe. On page 60, he takes to the waves in Biarritz.



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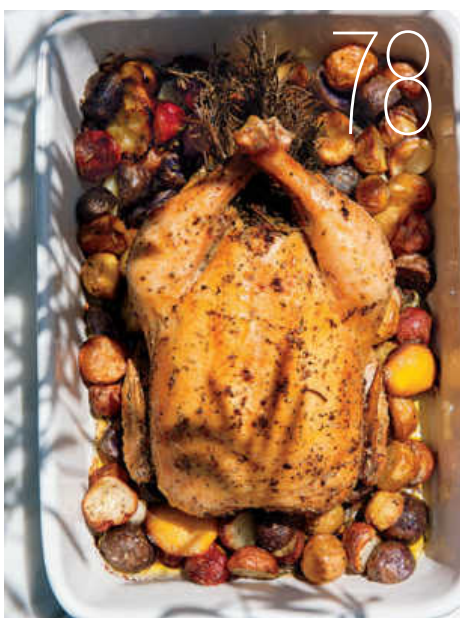
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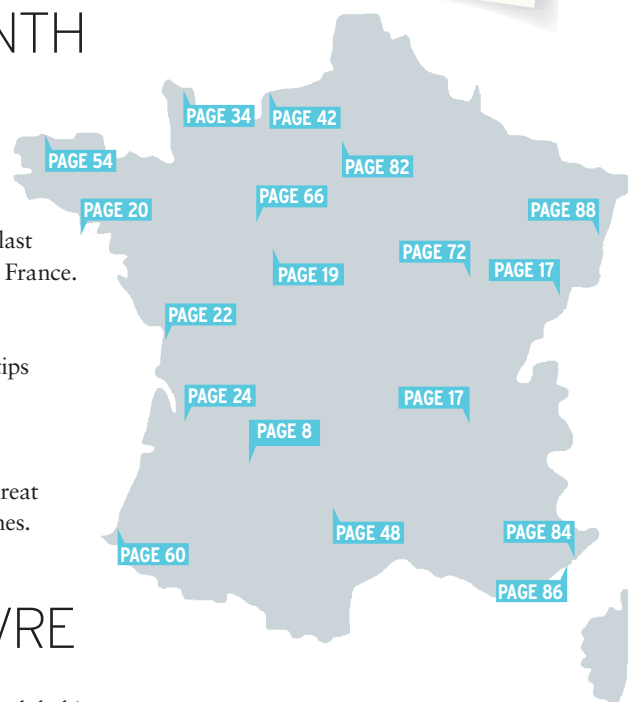
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● ON THE COVER

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Stephen Clarke, Pierre de Villiers, Sally Easton, Rosa Jackson,
Ray Kershaw, Paul Miles, Ian Moore, Neil Putnam,
Dominic Rippon, Tim Wesson
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NETSERVICES@FRANCEMAG.COM
PRINTED BY WILLIAM GIBBONS LTD, WILLENHALL, ENGLAND

US EDITION

FRANCE MAGAZINE (ISSN 0958-8213) (USPS 013-661)
IS PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY BY ARCHANT COMMUNITY MEDIA LTD,
CUMBERLAND HOUSE, ORIEL ROAD, CHELTENHAM,
GLOS, GL50 1BB, UK.

DISTRIBUTED IN THE US BY CSI, 2 CORPORATE DRIVE,
SUITE 945, SHELTON, CT 06484.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID IN SHELTON, CT,
AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO FRANCE,
PO BOX 37498, BOONE, IA 50037-0498.
CANADIAN GST NUMBER: 87211 8922 RT0001

FRANCE Magazine is published by Archant Community Media Ltd,
Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, Glos, GL50 1BB, UK.

Head office: Archant Community Media Ltd, Prospect House, Raven Road, Norwich NR1 1RE. Tel: 01603 628 311, www.archantmedia.co.uk. Company Registration no. 19300. Commission Paritaire no. 76379.
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France (Group) Total 33,832 France (UK edition) Total 14,655 France (US edition) Total 19,777.
All prices and contact details are correct at time of going to press. Prices for accommodation, restaurant meals and transport can change without prior notice. The publishers assume no responsibility for inadvertent inaccuracies or omissions.



COVER IMAGE: THE THREE ARCHES ON
THE CLIFFS OF ÉTRETAT IN NORMANDY
BY FRANCIS CORMON/HEMIS.FR



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ABOUT US

FRANCE Magazine is Britain and North America's best-selling magazine about France. Since 1990, it has enchanted readers with its stunning photography and excellent travel writing. Alongside its inspirational and informative travel articles, FRANCE Magazine offers features on food and wine, language and history, culture and current affairs; together, it gives readers the perfect taste of the very best of France. It truly is the next best thing to being there.

QUI SOMMES-NOUS ?

FRANCE Magazine est une publication de première qualité, rédigée en anglais et consacrée exclusivement à la France. Depuis 1990, cette publication mensuelle à la réputation incontestée, domine le marché francophile en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis. A travers des articles de voyage, des rubriques gastronomiques et linguistiques, FRANCE Magazine invite ses lecteurs à découvrir tous les meilleurs aspects de l'Hexagone et de ses produits.

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OUR AWARDS

2014

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■ Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Young Writer of the Year at the Aito (Association of Independent Travel Operators) Awards **Zoë McIntyre**

2013

■ Winner of Young Travel Writer of the Year at the British Travel Press Awards **Zoë McIntyre**
■ Winner of Best Travel Article at the Outdoor Writers' & Photographers' Guild **Judy Armstrong**

■ Winner of Gastronomy Article of the Year at the Abtof France French Tourist Board Travel Publication Awards **Eve Middleton**
■ Winner of Travel Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Winner of Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Publication Awards **Ray Kershaw**

2012

■ Winner of Best European Destination Travel Feature at the British Guild of Travel Writers Awards **Judy Armstrong**
■ Runner-up for Young Writer of the Year at the Aito Awards **Eve Middleton**

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FRANCE *at a glance*





AT THE WATER'S EDGE

A traditional flat-bottomed *gabare* boat cruises along the River Dordogne past the *Plus Beau Village* of La Roque-Gageac, which is backed by yellow-stone cliffs

PHOTOGRAPH: PASCALE ET BRUNO BOIGONTIER/HEMIS.FR

WHERE TWO ERAS MEET

Marseille's 19th-century Cathédrale de la Major stands in the brand new Euroméditerranée urban area near the old port

PHOTOGRAPH: CAMILLE MOIRENC/HEMIS.FR





STARRY NIGHT

This windmill stands watch in the little village of Saint-Julien-le-Montagnier, which looks over the Haute-Provence plateau from its hilltop in the Var

PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCK CHAPUT/HEMIS.FR

STROLL BY LAMPLIGHT

Tourists and locals make the most of a warm summer evening in the resort of Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the Pays Basque

PHOTOGRAPH: PIERRE JACQUES/HEMIS.FR

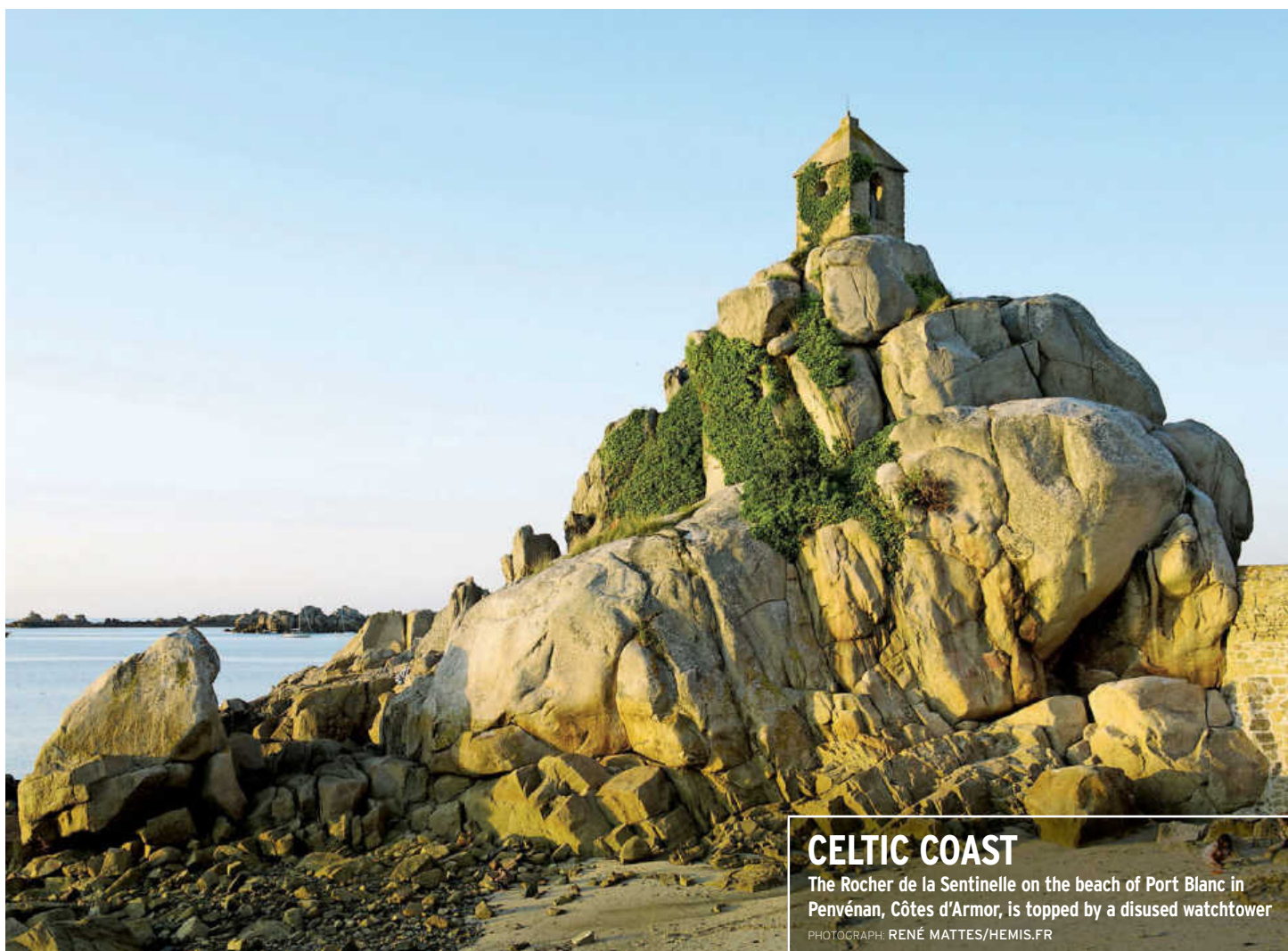




AWAY FROM IT ALL

The Pont de la Baraque spans the River Hérault near Saint-André-de-Majencoules in the Cévennes

PHOTOGRAPH: PIERRE JACQUES/HEMIS.FR



CELTIC COAST

The Rocher de la Sentinelle on the beach of Port Blanc in Penvénan, Côtes d'Armor, is topped by a disused watchtower

PHOTOGRAPH: RENÉ MATTES/HEMIS.FR



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Buzzy Bordeaux

The city of Bordeaux will be living up to its name as the wine capital of the world at its biennial extravaganza celebrating the region's great vintages. *Bordeaux Fête le Vin*, running from 23-26 June, centres on a two-kilometre wine trail along the banks of the River Garonne. It is here that eight tasting pavilions will allow visitors to sample such famous names as Margaux, Pomerol and Saint-Émilion from around 80 regional *appellations*.

Alongside the great Bordeaux vintages, there is a chance to taste delicious local produce ranging from Bassin d'Arcachon oysters to the Basque Ossau-Iraty cheese.

On all four nights, festivities culminate in a wine-themed son-et-lumière show projected on to the Palais de la Bourse, followed by a fireworks display over the Garonne. Other attractions include guided tours of vineyards, château wine tastings, a wine school and art exhibitions.

The festival, which was launched in 1998, has a particular resonance this year because it coincides with the scheduled opening of *La Cité du Vin*. This cultural centre exploring the world of wine is housed in a striking glass building beside the river and features a 35-metre-high observation tower. www.bordeaux-wine-festival.com, www.laciteduvin.com ➔



What to do in... April

PARIS MARATHON

See the City of Light from a different perspective by running around it as one of more than 40,000 racers in Paris's 40th marathon on 3 April. The course stretches from the Bois de Boulogne in the west to the Bois de Vincennes in the east and passes landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the Musée du Louvre. Tel: (Fr) 9 69 36 88 21 www.schneiderelectricparis-marathon.com

DRUMS BEAT

The *tambourin* (or tambour), a small drum that originated in Provence to accompany dancers, is the focus of an annual celebration in the historic town of Aix-en-Provence (pictured below).



The 30th festival, on 18-19 April, features street parades and concerts, including an anniversary knees-up with the Académie du Tambourin and other like-minded music groups. Tel: (Fr) 4 42 16 11 61 www.aixenprovence-tourism.com

POETRY IN MUSIC

Although known primarily for its collection of Impressionist art, the Musée d'Orsay on the Left Bank (pictured above) also holds music events. To coincide with the opening of an art exhibition, *Apollinaire, the Eyes of the Poet*, on 19 April, the museum has organised three lunchtime concerts featuring composers including Francis Poulenc



and Maurice Ravel who were inspired by the lyrical quality of his work. The exhibition runs until 24 May. Tel: (Fr) 1 40 49 48 14 www.musee-orsay.fr

SCALLOP FEAST

Seafood enthusiasts will be heading to Paimpol, on the northern Brittany coast, on 23-24 April for an annual festival celebrating the importance of scallop production to the local communities. Attractions include a parade led by the Confrérie de la Coquille Saint-Jacques, street entertainment, farmers' markets and the all-important tastings. Tel: (Fr) 2 96 20 83 16 www.paimpol-goelo.com

BOOK NOW, GO LATER...



HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

Ever wanted to spend the night in a treehouse? Then try La Cabane du Perche in Saint-Mard-de-Réno in the Orne *département* of Normandy. The treehouse, which nestles in the branches of two oaks, is fully heated and insulated, and is big enough for a family of four. Features include one double bed and two small single beds, a bathroom with shower and dry toilet, a large terrace and a hot tub at ground level. Prices start from £170 per night based on two adults and two children sharing, and including breakfast. Hot tub €45 per night (book in advance). Tel: (Fr) 9 66 92 35 64 www.cabane-dans-arbres.com



RURAL RETREAT

Couples or families looking to escape to a rural idyll will feel at home at La Queurie, a new B&B overlooking the River Orne in the Suisse Normande. A 15th-century barn has been restored using sustainable materials and has two bedrooms, one of which is a large family suite. The owner is a keen gardener and will show guests how to cut apple trees and create the perfect flower bed. Prices start from £90 per night based on two people sharing, with each additional child from £15. Tel: (Fr) 2 33 12 85 68 www.laqueurie.wordpress.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: DREAMTIME; FOTOLIA; BODIN; SYBILLE PIETREK; CAMILLE MORENCHENISER

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Take your seats for Jon Bryant's guide to French film festivals beyond the red carpet of Cannes

CABOURG

8-12 June

Audiences can wallow in short and full-length films about love, passion and heartbreak as the Normandy resort hosts its 30th festival of romantic cinema. The awards are called the Swann d'Or in honour of the writer Marcel Proust, who spent many summers in Cabourg. Previous winners include Audrey Tautou and Léa Seydoux. www.festival-cabourg.com



LA CIOTAT

19-21 August

This commune (*pictured above*) along the coast from Marseille is home to the Eden theatre, the world's oldest public cinema, where the Lumière brothers showed some of their earliest films. Re-opened in 2013 after a complete renovation, it now boasts red velvet seats and oak panelling, and hosts the annual Best of International Short Films festival. www.bestoffestival.com



LA ROCHELLE

1-10 July

Classics of world cinema are in the spotlight at the Charente-Maritime port's 44th film festival (*pictured above*). Directors featured include the poetic realist Jean Vigo, whose daughter Luce will present *L'Atalante* and *Zéro de Conduite*, two of only four films he made before his death, aged 29, in 1934. Director James Ivory will be another guest. www.festival-larochelle.org



DEAUVILLE

2-11 September

The Normandy resort's Festival of American Cinema, now in its 42nd year, matches Cannes for glamour and Hollywood celebrities. The town (*its boardwalk is pictured above*) will be a mass of stars and stripes, parties and screenings of independent films. Sean S. Baker's *Tangerine*, shot with an iPhone, won last year's Jury Prize. www.festival-deauville.com

BIARRITZ

26 September to 2 October

Like Deauville, the Basque resort looks across the Atlantic for inspiration, promoting Latin American cinema at a festival that celebrates its 25th anniversary this year by focusing on Ecuador. Screenings are complemented by tango classes, workshops and bands pumping out

salsa and bossa nova rhythms across the seafront.

www.festivaldebiarritz.com

STRASBOURG

September, dates TBC

The Alsace capital's annual European festival of horror, sci-fi and fantasy enables budding film-makers to send in their horror or fantasy films and video games. Attractions include 'Eek! It's Friday' late-night screenings, a zombie walk and a fantasy village. www.strasbourgfestival.com

LYON

10-16 October

The pioneering Lumière brothers lived and worked in Lyon, and the city pays tribute with an eponymous festival that shows restored prints of classic films and holds retrospectives (last year director Martin Scorsese was honoured). This tour de force of cinematic history is spread over 40 venues. www.festival-lumiere.org

BELFORT

26 November to 4 December

The Entrevue Film Festival in the Franche-Comté town screens features and shorts directed by young film-makers looking to be daring and innovative, sometimes with controversial results. There are also retrospectives, after-screening parties and grant awards. Tickets are free to anyone born in 1986. www.festival-entrevues.com/en

Just across the border...

MONACO

8-11 December

The principality's International Film Festival is better known as the Angel awards and shows only non-violent films. Champagne receptions and gala parties last well into the night after the art-house screenings. www.angelfilmawards.com

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PAINTING BY: ANDREW SPEAR

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

Ian Moore,
comedian



What makes
Tours my
favourite
place? Is it
the history?
Tours was
the medieval
capital of
France and

its heritage is there on every
street corner; its timber-
framed buildings leaning
askew like crooked teeth.

Is it its modernity?

A university town that
despite its longevity has
a spring in its step as bright
young things, the students,
walk its narrow alleys and
sit optimistically at its
numerous cafés and bars.

Is it its size? Tours has
everything a city should have,
certainly an almost arrogant
sense of its own importance,
thanks to high spots such as
the Place Plumereau or the
Basilique Saint-Martin; but
with less salubrious areas
too; all in what feels like
a small town.

Tours is chic one minute,
slightly scruffy the next,
it's both old and young.
Welcoming and standoffish.

But why do I like Tours so
much? Because it's now home.

● *Ian Moore is a stand-up
comedian and author of two
best-selling books about his
life in rural France. He writes
a column in our sister
magazine Living France.
Find out more at
<http://ianmoore.info>*



PHOTOGRAPHS: ISTOCKPHOTO

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

The products you need for your next holiday in France



This lightweight, weatherproof roll-top
backpack from Millican is the ideal
choice for those out and about in
France, with its padded sleeve for laptop
storage and ergonomic shoulder straps
for comfortable everyday wear
(Smith the Rollpack, £95,
www.homeofmillican.com).



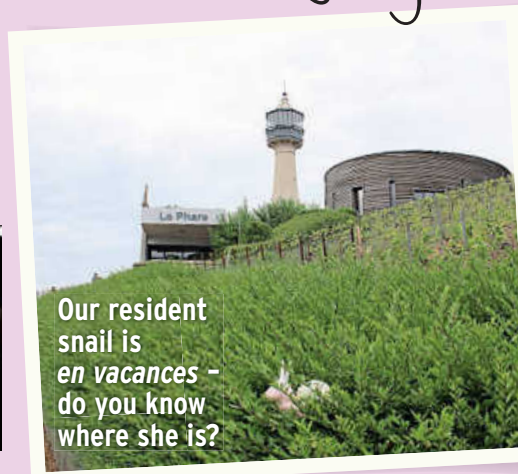
This multi-pocketed, water-
resistant toiletry bag will ease any
worries about taking enough
cosmetics on your next trip. The
main compartment is huge and
comes with zipped side-pockets
for easy access, and a hanging
hook (£49.99, www.lavievert.com).

Travel light on your next holiday with this
airline-approved cabin trolley bag, which has
a large main compartment and easy-access
front pockets (Slimbridge Barcelona, £49.99,
www.karabars.co.uk).



Les aventures de Sergette

Our intrepid gastropod Sergette
is out and about in France. Her
adventures this month take her
to an unusual museum in a famous
wine-producing region.



If you know the wine-producing region that Sergette is visiting, send the answer, plus your name and address, to editorial@francemag.com or write us a postcard (address on page 6) and you could win a case of three French wines (worth a total of £37.97) courtesy of Naked Wines (www.nakedwines.com). Deadline for entries is 6 April 2016.

The winner of the February competition is Andy Cory, from Brixham in Devon, who correctly identified the village of Eymet in Dordogne.



Contributor

INSIDER TIP ON FRANCE

Avoid queuing at *autoroute* tolls by signing up for the *télépéage* automated lane and obtaining a transponder from Sanef tolling. You just drive up, the barrier opens and you are billed at a later date in pounds sterling.

Paul Lamarra
Glasgow

An artist has no home in Europe except in Paris.

– **PHILOSOPHER**
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

DID YOU KNOW?
Louis XIX was king of France for just 20 minutes.



Reader

INSIDER TIP ON FRANCE

Use the various spoken versions of French-translation phone apps, especially in shops and restaurants. They are a great icebreaker when practising conversation with the locals.

Ray Morley
Strathaven, South Lanarkshire

ISLAND ESCAPES

France has more than 3,000 kilometres of coastline, with many beautiful islands simply waiting to be discovered. Here are three destinations that every visitor should add to their France bucket list



ÎLE DE NOIRMOUTIER

The island of Noirmoutier (pictured below, inset) lies off the Atlantic coast of the Vendée *département* and used to be accessible only across a causeway at low tide until a bridge was built in 1971. The marshes of the Müllembourg Nature Reserve attract many wildlife enthusiasts, particularly in spring when migratory birds nest here on their return from Africa. The island is also famed for its beaches, particularly Boucholeurs, Océan and Midi, all of which are great places to have a go at water sports.

Tel: (Fr) 2 51 39 80 71
www.ile-noirmoutier.com

BELLE-ÎLE-EN-MER

Located 15 kilometres off the Morbihan *département* of southern Brittany, Belle-Île-en-Mer (pictured right) is the region's largest island. The microclimate keeps temperatures mild all year round and makes it a popular destination with tourists, who take the 45-minute ferry trip from the Quiberon peninsula to the main town of Le Palais. The coastline is rocky, particularly in the south west, where you'll find the

Aiguilles de Port-Coton, a series of rocks jutting out to sea that inspired Claude Monet's 1886 painting *Les Rochers de Belle-Île, La Côte Sauvage*. Belle-Île-en-Mer has more than 60 beaches, including the Plage des Grands Sables, a two-kilometre stretch of sand south-east of Le Palais.

Tel: (Fr) 2 97 31 81 93
www.belleileenmer.co.uk



Read all about it . . .

Get plenty of Gallic inspiration with the 14th edition of *The Rough Guide to France* (Rough Guides, £17.99). Whether it is cycling past Loire Valley châteaux or eating hearty food in a *Lyonnais bouchon*, the book will ensure that you enjoy the best that France has to offer.

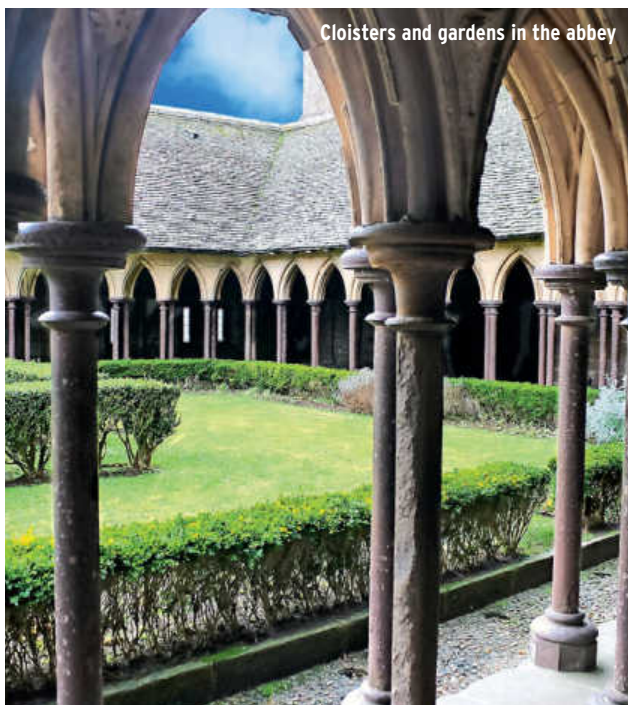
PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA;
ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES



The spectacular setting of the abbey
island of Mont-Saint-Michel

Travel back in time to... **Le Mont- Saint-Michel**

Families and couples with a sense of adventure have several ways to reach and explore this Unesco World Heritage site, as *FRANCE Magazine* discovers



Cloisters and gardens in the abbey

Perched on a rocky islet in a breathtaking bay where the regions of Normandy and Brittany meet, stands Le Mont-Saint-Michel. Comprising a Gothic-style Benedictine abbey and the village which grew up around it, the mount was for centuries one of Europe's major pilgrimage sites and is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

Most visitors take the shuttle bus or walk the 2.5 kilometres from the mainland car park. However, the more adventurous have other ways to reach the island. To get a real feel for the journey taken by medieval pilgrims, remove your shoes and join a guide on a seven-kilometre walk across the sands from the village of Genêts. The walk takes about two hours, but if you want to arrive more quickly, a ride on horseback is a great way to explore the bay.

Once on the rock, you have plenty of history to take in. Wander up the winding main street, Grande Rue, past pretty medieval buildings to find the island's star attraction, the Abbaye du Mont-Saint-Michel. This awe-inspiring structure, parts of which date from the 11th century, is best explored on a one-hour guided tour, operating regularly all year. From mid-July to the end of August (except Sundays), you can tour the abbey from 7pm to midnight, when it is lit up in an array of colours, and listen to chamber music recitals.

Clinging spectacularly to the rock at the northern edge of the abbey lies *La Merveille* (The Marvel). This wing features a cloister surrounded by delicately carved arches on granite pillars, grand chambers including a 13th-century dining hall, and a walking area boasting one of the finest ribbed vaulted ceilings in Europe. Another highlight is the Église Abbatiale, a mix of Norman, Romanesque and Gothic architectural styles, whose transept sits on a bed of solid rock.

You can get spectacular views of the bay by walking along the *Chemin des Remparts*, on the east of the mount, starting at the Tour du Nord and ending at the Porte du Roy. However, to fully appreciate the island's breathtaking setting, you must take to the air, either in a hot-air balloon, a microlight or a gyrocopter, and look down on the abbey and the sheep grazing in the meadows on the mainland.

For more information on what to visit and details of hotels and restaurants, see www.ot-montsaintmichel.com

Eight out of ten customers would recommend Eurotunnel Le Shuttle to their friends and family. With up to 85 departures a day, it is the fastest, most frequent way to the continent by car, which means Le Mont-Saint-Michel is closer than you think. Book early and get the best fares. Visit www.eurotunnel.com or call 0970 850 8133 to book your crossing.



Quick guide to...

La Rochelle



I've heard of the name... so where is it?

La Rochelle is situated on the Atlantic coast of France in the Charente-Maritime *département*. It was one of France's most important seaports from the 14th to the 17th centuries and has one of the largest marinas in the country.

What's there to see?

Known as the *Ville Blanche* (white city), La Rochelle is famous for the limestone facades of its buildings and the arcaded walkways that line the streets. Testament to the city's seafaring past are the 42-metre-high Tour Saint-Nicolas and Tour de la Chaîne, which served as surveillance points for ships entering the old port, and offer panoramic views. The city's top tourist

attraction is the state-of-the-art aquarium, which provides fascinating insights into the world's waters and life forms. Other attractions include the Musée des Beaux-Arts, with its impressive collection of 15th-20th century art, and the Musée du Nouveau Monde, which chronicles the city's role as a departure point for settlers heading to North America.

Where are the best places to eat?

For mouth-watering, freshly landed seafood head to Le Bar André (pictured above, menus from €22, tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 28 24, www.barandre.com). This large, maritime-themed restaurant serves generous platters of oysters, razor clams, prawns, whelks and shrimps. Another great place to sample the bounty of the sea is La Petite Auberge (mains from €20, tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 28 43,

www.lapetiteauberge17.fr). Dishes include stuffed squid with risotto, scallops with duck liver and cod with a chorizo crust. For French classics in a convivial setting try Le Bistrot du Marché (menus from €17, tel: (Fr) 5 46 27 28 52), with its selection of seafood platters, steak tartare and tartines.

It sounds great. Where can I stay?

Enjoy a comfortable night's sleep at the Best Western Hôtel Champlain (pictured below, inset, doubles from €84, tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 34 66, www.hotelchamplain.com), which is around ten minutes' walk from the harbour.

Get me there quick!

La Rochelle-Île de Ré airport is five kilometres north-west of the city centre and is served by easyJet, Flybe and Ryanair, return flights from £29.99.

For more information visit www.holidays-la-rochelle.co.uk

TRAVEL NEWS

DOWN ON THE FARM

Families can enjoy life on a French farm at two new locations from glamping holiday specialist Feather Down Farms.

La Monderais in Brittany and La Ferme de Ronfil in Normandy are easily accessible for ferry travellers, with the first being 80 kilometres from Saint-Malo and the second 65 kilometres from Caen. Families stay in tents or cabins and can see first-hand how their food is grown and help out on the farm if they wish. Stays start from £245 per tent or cabin for four nights. www.featherdown.co.uk

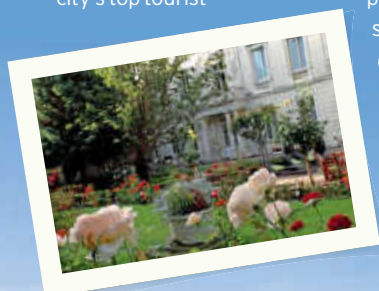


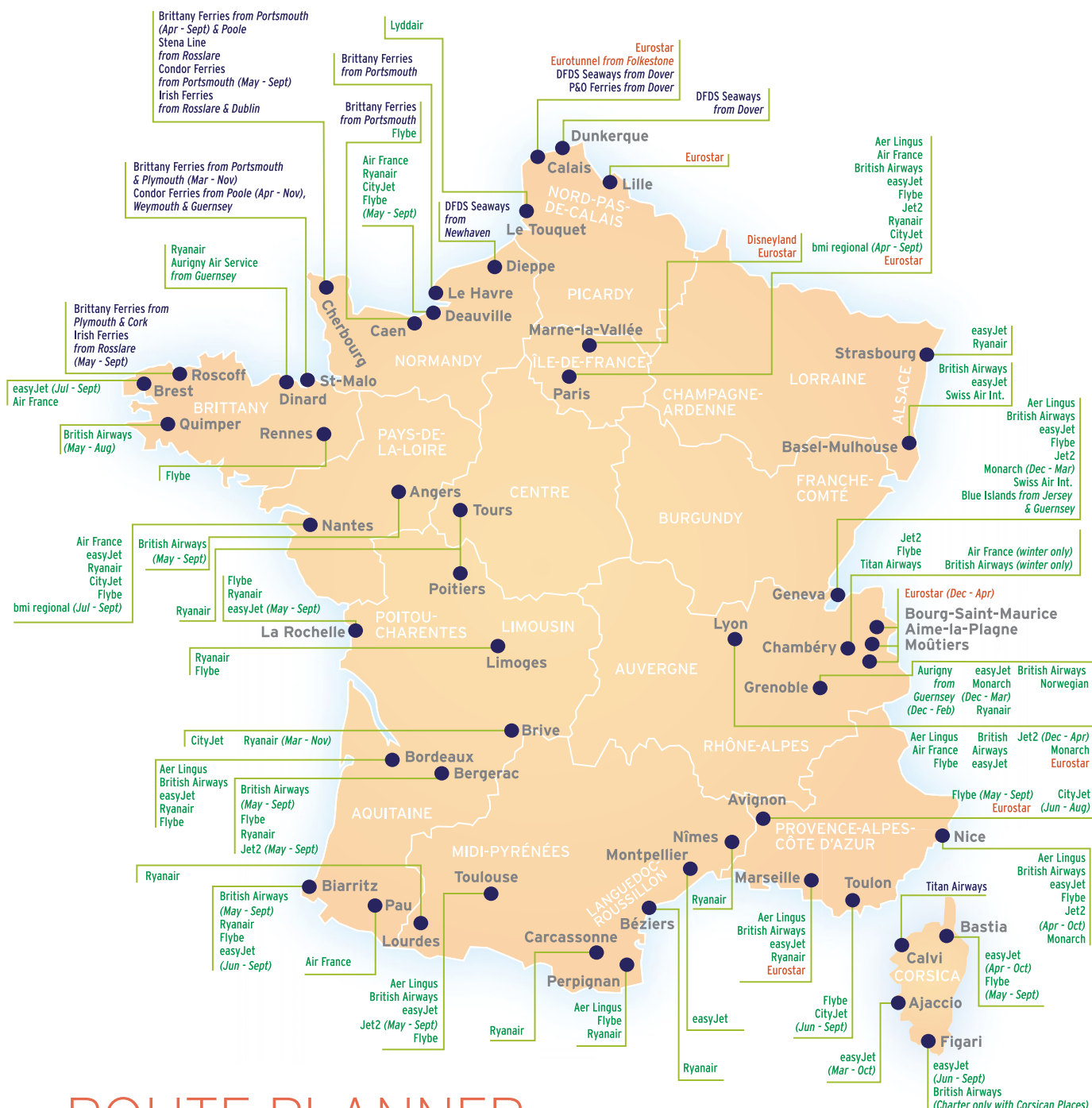
SUMMER FLIGHTS

Low-cost airline Flybe is expanding its summer programme from Birmingham Airport. The carrier will fly five times a week to the port of Nantes on the River Loire, on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (from £35.99 one way); four times a week to Rennes, capital of Brittany, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays (from £32.99 one way); and twice a week to Limoges (pictured above), departing on Wednesdays and Saturdays (from £39.99 one way). Flights will operate from 27 March to 29 September. Flybe has also begun flying daily from Southampton to Paris Charles de Gaulle, with return fares from £69.99. www.flybe.com

FERRY FOCUS

National Ferry Fortnight returns for its eighth year from 5-19 March with a range of promotional offers for anyone planning their next trip to France. The campaign takes a different theme each year and in 2016 the aim is to encourage families to take the ferry for the first time or rediscover the pleasures of sea travel. The event is organised by Discover Ferries, which represents the UK's major ferry operators. www.nationalferryfortnight.co.uk





ROUTE PLANNER

Plan your journey to France with our handy map and directory

FERRIES

Brittany Ferries

Tel: 0330 159 7000
www.brittanyferries.co.uk

Condor Ferries

Tel: 0845 609 1024
www.condorferries.co.uk

DFDS Seaways

Tel: 0871 574 7235
www.dfdsseaways.co.uk

Irish Ferries

Tel: (ROI) 818 300 400
www.irishferries.com

P&O Ferries

Tel: 0871 664 2121
www.poferries.com

Stena Line

Tel: (ROI) 1 204 7777
www.stenaline.ie

RAIL

Eurostar

Tel: 03448 118 444
www.eurostar.com

Eurotunnel

Tel: 0844 335 3535
www.eurotunnel.com

Voyages-sncf.com

Tel: 0844 848 5848
www.voyages-sncf.com

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus

Tel: 0871 718 2020
www.aerlingus.com

Air France

Tel: 0871 663 3777
www.airfrance.co.uk

Aurigny Air Services

Tel: 01481 822 886
www.aurigny.com

Blue Islands

Tel: 0845 620 2122
www.blueislands.com

bmi regional

Tel: 0330 333 7998
www.bmi-regional.com

British Airways

Tel: 0844 493 0787
www.britishairways.com

CityJet

Tel: 0871 405 2020
www.cityjet.com

easyJet

Tel: 0330 365 5000
www.easyjet.com

Flybe

Tel: 0371 700 2000
www.flybe.com

Jet2

Tel: 0800 408 1350
www.jet2.com

Lyddair

Tel: 01797 322 207
www.lyddair.com

Monarch

Tel: 0871 940 5040
www.monarch.co.uk

Norwegian

Tel: 0843 378 0888
www.norwegian.com

Ryanair

Tel: 0871 246 0000
www.ryanair.com

Swiss Int. Air

Tel: 0845 601 0956
www.swiss.com

Titan Airways

Tel: 01279 680 616
www.titan-airways.co.uk



DAY ONE

The tangle of *autoroutes* around Bordeaux and the A63 further south can often be the most stressful part of a journey from the Channel ports to Biarritz on the Spanish border. The solution is to turn off the A10 before reaching Bordeaux and go in search of the quieter roads, the vineyards and the extensive moorland woods of the Landes.

Leave the A10 at junction 39a and head for Libourne, picking up the D670. Go through the town, following the signs for Bergerac, and after six kilometres turn left on to the D122 to reach the famous wine village of Saint-Émilion. **1**

RoadTRIP

Break up your journey to the far south-west of France and explore the vineyards and elegant spa towns of the Landes

Join a tourist office tour to explore this maze of butter-stone merchants' houses, cobbled streets, catacombs and cellars. Climb to the top of the Tour du Roy for views over the Unesco-listed vineyards. Wine-tasting opportunities are numerous, but start at the Maison du Vin (tel: (Fr) 5 57 55 50 55, www.maisonduvinsaintemilion.com). Stay the night at the stylish Hostellerie de Plaisance in Place du Clocher and have dinner there as well (doubles from €273, *menu du jour* €72, tel: (Fr) 5 57 55 07 55, www.hostelleriedeplaisance.com).

DAY TWO

Leave Saint-Émilion on the D122 for a drive along the back roads of the Entre-Deux-Mers vineyards. Take the D670 and D936 before crossing the River

Dordogne at Branne and then head for the Abbaye de la Sauve-Majeure (D11, D239). Explore the ruins of the 11th-century Benedictine abbey **2**, which was once a prominent stop on the pilgrims' way to Santiago de Compostela and is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

If it is a Wednesday and still before lunch, make the short detour to the weekly market on the arcaded square at Créon. Otherwise take the winding D239 and D13 to Cadillac. At the junction with the D10 turn right and then left over the Garonne and follow the river upstream towards Langon. This is sweet wine country, with plenty of outlets providing *vente-dégustation*. The D1113 passes through Barsac and then you can turn right at Preignac and head into

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANNE LANTA/OT SAINT-ÉMILION; PHILIPPE BLANCHOT/HEMIS.FR; DREAMSTIME; ROMAIN CINTRACT/HEMIS.FR; JEAN-MARC BARRÈRE/HEMIS.FR; XAVIER BOYMOND; PAUL LAMARRA



the hill country to visit the village of Sauternes and the world-famous Château d'Yquem **3** (www.yquem.fr).

Return to Preignac and the D1113 and turn right for Langon. Join the dual-carriageway and cross the River Garonne, following signs for Saint-Macaire. This medieval riverside town, buttressed by ramparts **4**, is a warren of squares, narrow streets, wide stone arcades and gate towers. Enjoy a late lunch on the tree-shaded terrace of Le Médiéval (*menu du jour* from €12.50, tel: (Fr) 5 56 62 28 38, www.tilleul-medieval.com).

Rejoin the dual-carriageway, cross the River Garonne for the last time and head south on the N524 to Bazas. This *bastide* (a fortified medieval town) is dominated by the Gothic cathedral of Saint John the Baptist **5**, yet another Unesco World Heritage site.

Sample the famous Bazas marbled beef at the Bistrot Saint-Jean on the arcaded cathedral square (*côte de boeuf* for two €46, tel: (Fr) 5 56 25 18 53, www.bistrotsaintjean.e-monsite.com).

Stay at the ivy-clad Domaine de Fompeyre (doubles from €74, tel: (Fr) 5 56 25 98 00, www.domaine-de-fompeyre.com).

DAY THREE

Head south-east on the D655 to the pleasant old town of Casteljaloux. Spend the morning at the spa and its thermally heated outdoor pools and discover your inner Zen (2hr pass €15, tel: (Fr) 5 53 20 59 00, www.bains-casteljaloux.com).

The rest of the day's drive takes you across the level wooded moorland of the Landes, firstly on the D933 towards Mont-de Marsan. If you have time, detour on to the D11 to Labastide d'Armagnac, where you will find a chapel dedicated to cyclists and an adjacent museum.

Return to the D933 and continue to the junction with the D934. Take the slip road for Villeneuve-de-Marsan and Aire-sur-l'Adour, which makes a pleasant afternoon break.

Just over the River Adour turn right on to the D39 and then the D65 for

Eugénie-les-Bains, a spa town named after the wife of Emperor Napoléon III. It was, however, chef Michel Guérard who put the town on the map with his hotel and restaurant complex **6**. Dine in the three-Michelin-star Les Prés d'Eugénie (menus from €130) or in his cheaper, rustic Ferme aux Grives (menu €51) and stay in the Maison Rose guesthouse (doubles from €170, tel: (Fr) 5 58 05 06 07, www.michelguerard.com).

DAY FOUR

From Eugénie-les-Bains take the D11 and D25 to Saint-Sever, which has a 12th-century church, a convent cloister and a museum devoted to the Jacobins, the most famous political club in the French Revolution. Today's main attraction is Salies-de-Béarn **7**, a belle époque spa town famous for its very salty waters. Take the D933 to Orthez, then follow the D817 and go downstream with the Gave (river) de Pau. Then pick up the D933 again and go under the A64 *autoroute* to reach Salies. The Thermes de Salies-de-Béarn is housed in a distinctive Moorish style building (1hr entry €9.50, tel: (Fr) 5 59 38 10 11, www.thermes-de-salies.com). After a session floating in the warm salt water, have lunch at Restaurant des Voisins (menus from €22, tel: (Fr) 5 59 38 01 79, www.restaurant-des-voisins.fr).

From Salies head north on the D430 to join the A64 at junction seven. Go west and arrive in Biarritz in time for a champagne aperitif overlooking the ocean. 🌊

Paul Lamarra

Enjoy this article? Tell us where you'd like your road trip to be and we'll plan it out in a future edition. Email editorial@francemag.com

● Go surfing in Biarritz – see page 60.



MAIN PICTURE: The royal crypt in the Basilique Saint-Denis;
PICTURED BELOW: Charles X, the last Bourbon king of France

Return of the king?

Campaigners believe that the remains of Charles X, France's last Bourbon monarch, should be brought home, as **Paul Lamarra** explains

A campaign has been launched to bring home the remains of Charles X, the last Bourbon king of France and brother of the ill-fated Louis XVI, to rest in the royal vault in the Basilique Saint-Denis on the edge of Paris, where all but three French kings are buried.

Leading the appeal is an association of historians, politicians and descendants of the monarch, including Jack Lang, a former French government minister; Anne-Aymone Giscard d'Estaing, wife of former president Valéry; and Princess Marie-Thérèse de Bourbon-Parme.

"Charles X was the last king of France and he is the only one not to rest in his homeland," Clotilde Pauléat, vice-president of the association, told *FRANCE Magazine*. "It is like a missing piece in our history."

The Bourbon dynasty was restored in 1815 after the fall of Napoléon Bonaparte, with Charles X succeeding his brother Louis XVIII to the French throne in 1824. In 1830, following the July Revolution, prompted by Charles's curbs

on the press and parliament, he was forced to abdicate and flee France. For a time, he lived in Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh and finally in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Riddled with debt and pursued by his creditors, Charles X left a controversial legacy.

He died of cholera in 1836 in present-day Nova Gorica in Slovenia and his ashes are buried in the town's Kostanjevica monastery, along with six relatives, who also fled France. The association hopes to repatriate the other Bourbons as well, with the exception of Charles X's grandson Henri, Comte de Chambord – the last *dauphin* – because his will expressly forbade it.

Convinced that the French people have shown a new enthusiasm for the historical period known as the Restoration, the association hopes to convince President François Hollande's government to negotiate with the Slovenian authorities and sanction the



move before the French presidential elections in 2017.

"The denial of history has never been auspicious," warned Pauléat. "We believe King Charles X and the last Bourbons cannot be condemned to eternal exile. Today, France is in political, social and economic crisis,

and there is a need to unite the French around a national project that would reconcile the country with its long history. They are the custodians and heirs of this fabulous history of France."

The association is careful to deny any royalist sympathies, insisting that the return of the famously homesick king would be particularly poignant for France as a whole.

"Deciding who is the successor to the French throne is not our cause; if there were only one branch making a claim to the crown we would have a less complex project," Pauléat said. "However as a nod to those still interred in Nova Gorica we say: 'Long live the King' all the same."

PHOTOGRAPHS: BERTRAND RIEGER/HEMISER; DESIGN PICS INC/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; JULIEN DE FONTENAY/JDD/SPAREX SHUTTERSTOCK; HEMIS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MAYOR OUT TO CHANGE THE FACE OF PARIS

Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo is on a mission to reinvent the city and possibly leave her own indelible mark. A recent competition, *Reinventer Paris*, invited international architects to come up with 23 innovative and eye-catching projects; winners included a plant-covered housing block and a commercial-cum-residential project featuring 1,000 floating trees.

However, the Socialist Mayor's most controversial plan is to redraw the boundaries of some of the city's 20 arrondissements, unleashing the anger of her political opponents, who accuse her of gerrymandering, and of many Parisians, who attach a great deal of social status and monetary value to their address.

As a compromise, Hidalgo says she will push on with her plans to merge the first four arrondissements in the historic heart of the city into one, reducing the total to 17, but that postal addresses will be unchanged.

Although Hidalgo is mayor of all of



ABOVE: The Ternes-Villiers scheme near Porte Maillot; **BELOW:** Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo

Paris, each arrondissement has its own mayor and town hall. This administrative arrangement has been in place since 1860 when Baron Haussmann redeveloped the city, and the spiralling pattern of the districts is referred to as the *escargot*.

The mayor claims that the changes are necessary to even out wide variations in population. The 1st arrondissement, centered on the Île de la Cité and Notre-Dame, has only 17,000 residents, while the 15th arrondissement, which takes in the residential districts of Montparnasse, has more than 200,000.

The plans, which were passed by the city council after a heated debate, have been presented to the French parliament for final approval. A decision is expected by the end of this year.



NEWS IN BRIEF

- Paris has formally submitted its bid to host the 2024 Olympic Games. Under the slogan of '*La Force d'un Rêve*' ('The Power of Dreams') the city will compete with Rome, Budapest and Los Angeles for the chance to host the event.

- The saga surrounding plans for a new airport in

western France, at Notre-Dame-des-Landes near Nantes, is to be settled by a local referendum, President François Hollande has announced. However, arguments over the phrasing of the question and who should vote are threatening the process.

- Eagles of Death Metal, the American heavy metal band who were playing at the Bataclan theatre on the night that

four terrorists burst in and murdered 90 fans, have returned to Paris to perform as promised. Hundreds of survivors attended the concert, at the Olympia music hall.

- The sluggish French economy has failed to remove the fizz from champagne. Sales for 2015 were a record-breaking €4.75 billion, up almost six per cent on 2014, thanks to a big growth in exports.

C'est qui?

Every month we cast a spotlight on a figure making headlines

Name: Paul Bocuse.

Occupation: Chef and restaurateur.

Tell me more: When Paul Bocuse turned 90 this year, it was a moment of national celebration. In culinary terms he is an icon and his restaurant, L'Auberge du Pont de Collonges in his home town of Lyon, which has held three Michelin stars since 1965, is an international landmark. People travel from all over the world to sample his signature black truffle soup.

Since taking over his father's restaurant in 1959 he has been at the forefront of innovation in French gastronomy. The delicate and well-crafted portions he designed for the maiden flight of Concorde in 1969 were widely seen as the first step in the development of *nouvelle cuisine*. To win the Bocuse d'Or, a biennial competition that he organises in Lyon, is seen by many chefs around the world as the ultimate accolade.

Despite the apparent affectations of three-star cuisine, Bocuse believes that his rigorously seasonal and locally inspired menus are in keeping with the French tradition of *cuisine du marché*. His mantra is that the dish should taste of its ingredients.

Although he no longer cooks, Bocuse has become a brand. In Lyon his empire includes four brasseries, each specialising in a different aspect of French cuisine. His boutiques around the world sell Bocuse-branded cookbooks, champagne and even mugs. ➡➡➡



La grande question

Every month we explain the background to a top news story

Should François Hollande stand for a second term as President?

In November 2014 an increasingly unpopular President François Hollande made a television appeal to the electorate for time and trust, and promised that he would not campaign for a second term if unemployment did not start to fall.

Hollande was confident that his economic reforms would bear fruit, but unemployment has continued to rise and 2015 ended with a record 3.59 million out of work in France.

With just a year to go to the presidential elections, politicians within his Parti Socialiste (PS) and political commentators believe that the gamble has failed and that he should step down at the end of his five-year term. Some Socialists are worried that if he doesn't announce this soon, there will not be enough time to select a new candidate.

Polls suggest that Hollande would not progress to the second-round head-to-head vote next May and that the contest would be between the candidate representing Nicolas Sarkozy's Les Républicains party and Marine Le Pen, leader of the extreme-right Front National.

Favourites to succeed him from within the PS include Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Manuel Valls, while *Le Point* magazine has identified the relatively unknown junior trade minister Matthias Fekl as having the potential to win over the hard left.



Gallery celebrates collection coup

Paris's newest art gallery, the Fondation Louis Vuitton, has pulled off a coup by attracting the first exhibition outside Russia of the Sergei Shchukin collection.

The 250 paintings, which include 50 Picassos, 13 Monets, 38 Gauguins, eight Cézannes and four Van Goghs, is considered to be one of the world's finest collections of French Impressionist and post-Impressionist art. Shchukin, a Muscovite textile trader, assembled the collection on regular business trips to Paris in the early 1900s.

When the artworks go on display in the autumn, it will be the first time the collection has been displayed in its entirety since it was seized by the Communists in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917. Lenin signed the confiscation order and later Stalin divided the works between museums throughout the Soviet Union, including the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg.

The Fondation Louis Vuitton's building, designed by Frank Gehry, is a work of art in itself, with its glass sails towering over the Bois de Boulogne.



Centenary tributes at Verdun

This year marks the centenary of the Battle of Verdun, in which 300,000 French and German soldiers lost their lives. To coincide with the anniversary, the Mémorial de Verdun, the museum which catalogues the 300-day battle, has reopened after two years of renovation and extension work. The new layout, which adds 1,900 square metres of exhibition space, cost €12.5 million.

Visiting the museum is described as an immersive experience and is

arranged over three floors: the basement level will concentrate on the soldiers' journey to the front; ground level offers an explanation of the importance of the battle and its context; and the new glass terrace on the roof explains the topography of the battlefield. Everyday items exhibited in simple wooden display cabinets give a poignant insight into this battle of attrition which the Germans hoped would "bleed France white".

Other centenary events include a historical re-enactment of the French stand against the initial German advance in the Bois des Caures, a Mass at the Douaumont Ossuary (pictured) and a national remembrance ceremony attended by President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 29 May.



FRENCH RISK LOSING ROLLED 'R'

The distinctive features of French regional accents, including the rolled 'r', are in danger of dying out, according to linguistics experts. They say the threat to local accents is an inevitable result of the decline in regional languages.

Philippe Boula de Mareüil, a linguist and director of the national research centre CNRS, said that spoken French was being homogenised as young people increasingly adopted the accent of the Paris elites.

Having a Parisian accent is seen as essential for progressing in the professions. The accents of Picardy and Alsace, however, are considered to put people at a particular disadvantage. The newspaper *Le Figaro* reports that the only exception to the loss of regional accents seems to be among sports commentators and weather presenters.



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Ref: 60502 A rare find - Perigordian style renovation project including a tobacco barn and outbuildings.



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Pas de Calais €339,200

Ref: 60449 4 bed home with indoor heated pool and a separate converted barn on the edge of the 7 Valleys.



Charente Maritime €298,920

Ref: 60405 Immaculate 3 bedroom bungalow with inground pool located in a famous oyster port village.



Gironde €487,600

Ref: 60360 5 bed provencal style villa on the outskirts of Ste Foy La Grande with pool and over 1 acre.



Maine et Loire €399,000

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Dordogne €999,995

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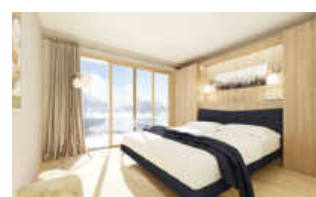
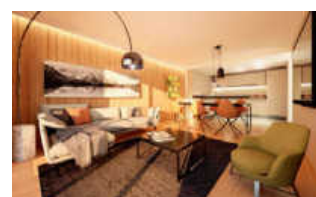


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READER PHOTO COMPETITION

The winner of this month's competition is Tony Perkins, from Witney in Oxfordshire, with this picture of visitors exploring a narrow street in Menton in the Alpes-Maritimes *département*.

Send us your holiday picture capturing the essence of France – either to our online reader gallery or by email – and we'll publish the best image in next month's *FRANCE Magazine*. The winner will receive two great prizes: a panoramic pod for taking 360° landscape shots on their smartphone (£15.99 from www.iwantoneofthose.com) and £50 of credit from photo personalisation specialist Photobox (www.photobox.co.uk). To enter the May competition, send your high-resolution image to editorial@francemag.com or upload it to *FRANCE Magazine*'s Flickr page, www.flickr.com/groups/france_magazine by 18 March. See the Flickr page for terms and conditions.



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BOÎTE AUX LETTRES

STAR
LETTER

Guardian angel

Sitting in a café in Paris on the night of the terrorist attacks in November, I wouldn't have known anything was going on in the nearby *arrondissement*. It wasn't until I got back to my hotel and turned on the TV that my sister and I discovered the mayhem. The shock and sadness we felt was indescribable.

The beauty and history of Paris is everywhere. I walked several times to the Arc de Triomphe, put there by Napoléon for his troops to walk beneath after their victory at the Battle of Austerlitz. Its magnificent bas-relief was lit up that night. The *Departure of the Volunteers of 1792* (pictured) depicts an open-armed angel flying above the soldiers as they leave to defend the nation. Her demeanour suggests boldness, as if to say, "no worries, I'll protect these men."

The arch is solid, beautifully sculpted and meaningful. It is a reminder of the stoicism and depth of the French people. They have survived other attacks



throughout history and have adorned their city with remembrances.

With the angel of Paris watching over them, they will continue to open their markets, sit in their cafés and live their lives to the full in this city so close to their hearts.

Sarah Franklin
Keene, New Hampshire, USA



@kdaykin

I can't wait for a long weekend in Paris this summer.

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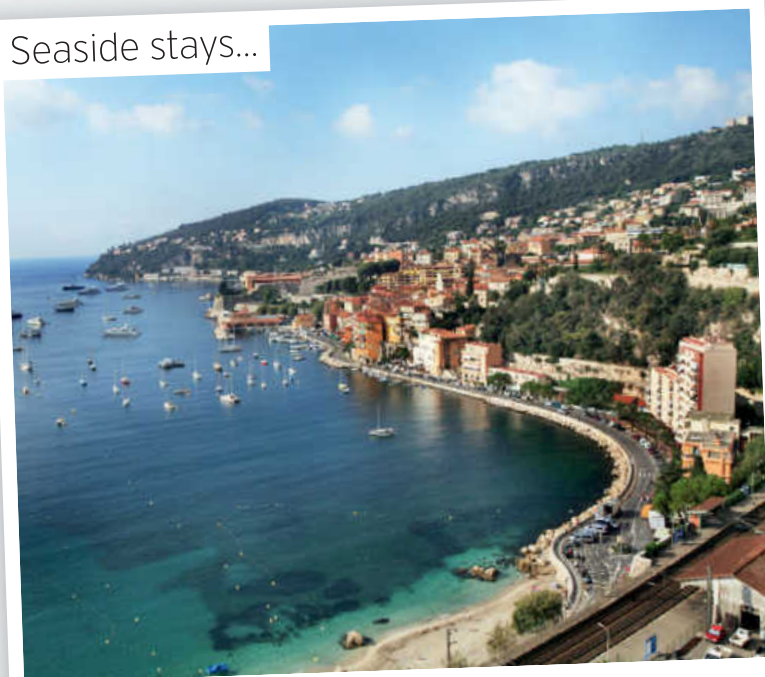
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TAKE THE FERRY:

◀ LE LANDEMER, Urville-Nacqueville

You can't get much closer to the sea than at the newly refurbished Le Landemer, which is perched at the end of a beautiful beach on the Cotentin Peninsula, only ten kilometres from Cherbourg. The refit was carried out to mark the hotel's 150th anniversary, and its heritage as a bolthole for such luminaries as Claude Monet, Édith Piaf and Boris Vian. Its ten bedrooms all have a sea view, with the four superior rooms housed in the *longère* to the side, each with a sea terrace and a private garden at the back. The restaurant is in the conservatory, and also enjoys spectacular views.

Tel: (Fr) 2 33 04 05 10

www.le-landemer.com

Doubles from €85, breakfast €15.50.

HÔTEL VENT D'OUEST, Le Havre

In the heart of the Normandy port of Le Havre, among Auguste Perret's now Unesco-listed post-war architecture, the Hôtel Vent d'Ouest lives up to its maritime connections, and many of the 35 rooms have seaside and seafaring themes. There are also three apartments with kitchens, living areas and bedrooms. The spa has a steam room and Spa Nuxe treatments. There is no restaurant at the hotel, but lunch or dinner can be brought to your room or served in the lounge for an additional €35 (including breakfast).

Tel: (Fr) 2 35 42 50 69

www.ventdouest.fr

Doubles from €100, breakfast when booked separately from other meals €15. ➤➤➤



PHOTOGRAPHS: BAPTISTE ALMODOVAR/LE LANDEMER



▲ HÔTEL LE NOUVEAU MONDE, Saint-Malo

This 83-room, four-star hotel on the seafront brings the style of a cruise liner to dry land. The nautical theme, complete with wallpaper, lanterns and beautiful colonial-style furniture, really makes you feel part of a seafaring adventure. Many rooms have balconies overlooking the beach – the perfect place to play ship's captain.

Tel: (Fr) 2 99 40 75 14
www.hotel-le-nouveau-monde.com
 Doubles from €119, breakfast €19.

HÔTEL PARTICULIER POPPA, Bayeux

Only 25 minutes from Caen, this stylish hotel in the centre of Bayeux is set in a former mansion house. It has just four bedrooms, all spacious and elegant, with high ceilings and marble fireplaces, and two also have fabulous views of the cathedral. The largest was once the ballroom, and has a beautiful parquet floor and enormous bathroom decorated in black, white and gold. Inside the mansion's central courtyard, guests can relax and admire the fruit trees and the kitchen garden.

Tel: (Fr) 2 31 22 41 90
www.hotel-poppa.com
 Doubles from €95 including breakfast.

▼ DOMAINE SAINT-CLAIR, Étretat

Just 40 minutes north along the coast from Le Havre, Étretat is famous for its white cliffs, which became a favourite subject of artists Claude Monet and Gustave Courbet (see feature on page 42), while the area was the 'see and be seen' destination of the belle époque. This hotel celebrates these connections by naming each room after a personality, including Marcel Proust and the dancer Isadora Duncan. The hotel also has a heated outdoor pool and a spa. The restaurant uses local produce as well as vegetables from its garden.

Tel: (Fr) 2 35 27 08 23
www.chateauxhotels.com
 Doubles from €120, breakfast €14.

HÔTEL ATLANTIC, Wimereux

For a breath of fresh sea air, you can't do better than the Hôtel Atlantic, which is – contrary to what its name suggests – a stone's throw from the Channel. Set on the seafront at Wimereux, 25 minutes down the coast from Calais, its 18 boutique rooms each have a sea view and some have a terrace. There are two restaurants; a bistro-style eatery offering quick, simple meals, and a more gastronomic affair with a menu that is 90 per cent sea food. The hotel also has a wellness centre, which offers massages and other treatments.

Tel: (Fr) 3 21 32 41 01
www.atlantic-delpierre.com
 Doubles from €147, breakfast €15.50.



PHOTOGRAPHS: JEAN-CHARLES VALENNIE, CHÂTEAUX & HOTELS COLLECTION

► MANOIR DE BEAUCRON, Brucheville

Set in the heart of the Cotentin and Bessin regional park, 40 minutes south of Cherbourg, this 16th-century manor house is an ideal hideaway for birdwatchers, with all four of its rooms being named after birds. Reached via an elegant, spiral stone staircase, the rooms are decorated in tasteful tones of beige and raspberry. Anne-Laure Guerche, the helpful host, treats her guests to a delicious breakfast of fresh bread and croissants, fruit juice, home-made jam and rice pudding. The Manoir is within easy reach of the D-Day beaches, Mont-Saint-Michel and Bayeux.

Tel: (Fr) 2 33 42 40 25

www.manoirdebeaucron.com

Doubles from €88 including breakfast.

CHÂTEAU DE MONTREUIL, Montreuil-sur-Mer

Just a 50-minute dash south of Calais, the heavenly village of Montreuil-sur-Mer, whose cobbled streets inspired Victor Hugo to write *Les Misérables*, makes a great overnight stop or indeed a weekend in its own right. The Château de Montreuil is a charming ten-room hotel based in a manor house that was once the country retreat of the Wooster/Rothschild family. If you can book room 1, you'll be rewarded with a four-poster bed and an enormous bathroom with a copper ceiling. The excellent restaurant serves locally sourced seafood and other regional delicacies.

Tel: (Fr) 3 21 81 53 04

www.chateaudemontreuil.com

Doubles from €220, breakfast from €19.

HÔTEL FRANCE & CHATEAUBRIAND, Saint-Malo

Set just inside the walls of Saint-Malo, this charming 19th-century hotel has a striped awning and *tricolore* flags fluttering above its own bistro, plus 80 spacious rooms. Some are more recently decorated than others, but 20 offer sea views over the town's impressive fortifications. The hotel makes a perfect base for exploring this historic port.

Tel: (Fr) 2 99 56 66 52

www.hotel-chateaubriand-st-malo.com

Doubles from €85, breakfast €12.



▼ UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE, Bois-Guilbert

This vegetarian B&B is 50 minutes from Dieppe and offers a rustic welcome among cider orchards and grazing pastures. Its two rooms are beautifully decorated in neutral tones and are the ideal place to switch off from the world (there's no TV). Evening meals are simple *table d'hôte* affairs with home-made vegetarian meals, while breakfast comprises home-made bread, pastries and yoghurt, and organic apple juice.

Tel: (Fr) 2 35 79 83 71

www.chambresdhoties-normandie.fr

B&B doubles €65, evening meal €20pp.



▼ OCEANIA, Saint-Malo

The ultra-modern four-star Oceania enjoys a fantastic beachside location and is just a few minutes' walk from the town centre, but with so many mod cons you may not be able to tear yourself away. The achingly cool rooms are decorated in clean lines, crisp whites and cool greys, and boast plasma screen TVs and Nespresso machines; some even have a whirlpool bath. Elsewhere in the hotel, you can indulge in a massage, relax in the hot tub, or sip cocktails.

Tel: (Fr) 2 99 56 84 84

www.oceaniahotels.co.uk

Doubles from €95, breakfast €11. ➡



▼ BRUCE CASTLE, Brix

Though this neo-classical mansion 14 kilometres south of Cherbourg is linked to the kings of Scotland, on account of it being built on their ancestral land, Bruce Castle is a French treat. The house is packed with antiques gathered together by its friendly hosts, the Fontanets. The three spacious bedrooms boast chandeliers, gilt-framed portraits and oriental rugs, along with enormous bathrooms. Breakfast is served in the dining room, where the table is laid with white porcelain and silver cutlery.

Tel: (Fr) 2 33 41 99 62

www.sawdays.co.uk

Doubles from €110 including breakfast.



HÔTEL LE BRITTANY & SPA, Roscoff

Set on the small Sainte-Barbe peninsula overlooking the Île de Batz, this 17th-century former granite merchant's house was rebuilt stone by stone in 1974. As if its position wasn't relaxing enough – in full view of fishing boats going out to sea – the 23-room hotel boasts a state-of-the-art spa. Here, the therapies use seaweed collected from a Unesco-listed world biosphere reserve for their high concentrations of minerals and vitamins. For nutrition of the gastronomic kind, take a table at the one-Michelin-star restaurant, The Yachtsman, and savour chef Loïc Le Bail's delicious seafood menus.

Tel: (Fr) 2 98 69 70 78

www.hotel-brittany.com

Doubles from €155, breakfast €23.



▲ Manoir de la Fieffe, Cherbourg

It's hard to believe that the tranquil Manoir de la Fieffe B&B is less than 15 minutes from the ferry terminal, but what better place to relax before continuing your journey in France? The four spacious bedrooms are decorated in neutral tones, with objets d'art and fascinating finds from around the world. Outside, Emmanuel de La Fonchais, one of the two hosts, is making the most of his experience as a rare-plant nursery owner to create his own botanical garden.

Tel: (Fr) 2 33 20 81 45

www.sawdays.co.uk

Doubles from €100 including breakfast.

► HÔTEL CHEZ JANIE, Roscoff

This fun and friendly hotel perches on Roscoff's harbour front and has just 16 rooms. As the former meeting place for the Onion Johnnies (the bicycle-pushing, beret-wearing onion sellers) before they set sail for England, the hotel is proud of its Breton heritage. The whole place is decorated in a lively blend of red, orange, grey and white, with Breton sayings painted on the walls. Guests also have access to the Hôtel le Brittany's spa.

Tel: (Fr) 2 98 61 24 25

www.chezjanie.fr

Doubles from €69 including breakfast.



HÔTEL DE LA MATELOTE, Boulogne-sur-Mer

The four-star Matelote is another great place to stay on the Opal Coast, and its one-Michelin-star restaurant attracts foodies. The chef, Tony Lestienne, is the great-great-grandson of Clémence Lestienne, Boulogne's bearded lady, who was as well known for her gingerbread as her whiskers (yes, really). The hotel itself has 35 comfortable rooms, as well as an excellent relaxation suite, with a swimming pool, hot tub, hammam and sauna, and is right opposite Boulogne's main attraction – its superb Nausicaá aquarium.

Tel: (Fr) 3 21 30 33 33

www.la-matelote.com

Doubles from €105, breakfast from €15.50.

HÔTEL AUX TAMARIS, Roscoff

The pretty port of Roscoff is classed as one of Brittany's *Petites Cités de Caractère* and makes a great starting point for a holiday in the region. At its heart, the Hôtel aux Tamaris – which is more *chambre d'hôte* than hotel – has four serene rooms, all with a seaside theme. Each room has its own character,

featuring neutral tones, livened up with Celtic tartans and delicately painted wall murals. Guests can make the most of a relaxing thalassotherapy session at a nearby spa and feel the benefits of a seaside stay.

Tel: (Fr) 2 98 61 22 99

www.hotel-aux-tamaris.com

Doubles from €61, breakfast from €7.

▼ CHÂTEAU LA CHENEVIÈRE, Port-en-Bessin

Dating from the 18th century, the five-star Château la Chenevière offers 29 spacious and individually styled rooms, many with fireplaces. Set in 12 hectares of parkland just inland from the Normandy coast, the hotel has a pretty walled garden, a heated outdoor pool (set next to a beautiful glasshouse) and a tennis court. Its vegetable garden supplies the restaurant, which is in keeping with the hotel's environmental policy which also sees it actively saving water, recycling and bee-keeping. Just 30 minutes from Caen ferry port, it is close to Bayeux and the D-Day beaches.

Tel: (Fr) 2 31 51 25 25

www.lacheneviere.com

Doubles from €220, breakfast buffet €25. ➡➡

TAKE THE PLANE:



▲ Pullman Paris Roissy CDG Airport

Those with an early or late flight at Charles de Gaulle airport can now check into a new Pullman Paris Roissy, which has 305 sizeable rooms, a swimming pool and fitness room. The stylish bar offers unusual French cocktails, while the restaurant serves dishes made with locally sourced produce.

Tel: (Fr) 8 71 70 29 469

www.pullmanhotels.com

Doubles from £116 with breakfast.



TAKE THE TRAIN:



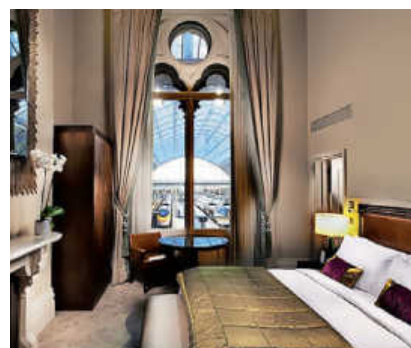
ROUGH LUXE, Saint Pancras

Less than five minutes' walk from the Eurostar terminal is the wonderfully off-beat Rough Luxe hotel. Its unusual, deliberately unfinished decor has the feel of a Parisian garret, and was inspired by the layers and layers of wallpaper that were found when the owner, French architect and designer Rabih Hage, began to refurbish it in 2008 – each layer telling a different story of the 19th-century building's history. While the rooms are small, they are no less enchanting, and with a fantastic breakfast spread and friendly hosts, it makes a great crash pad before you head off on the train.

Tel: 0207 837 5338

www.roughluxe.co.uk

Doubles from £144.



▲ GREAT NORTHERN HOTEL, London

Just across the road from the Eurostar terminal entrance proudly stands a hotel that evokes an earlier era of railway travel – the Great Northern. This curved, Grade II listed building was one of the world's first great railway hotels when it opened in 1854, but later fell into disuse. Following a £40 million refurbishment, it was re-launched in 2013 as a luxury 91-room hotel lying within the Western Concourse of King's Cross station.

Guests wanting to truly embrace the railway theme can stay in one of the Couchette rooms which, with their snugly fitting beds, are a modern twist on the old sleeper train carriages. I, however, stayed in a larger, high-ceilinged Cubitt room – named after the original architect, Lewis Cubitt.

The muted olive green and cream colours, and comfortable leather and walnut furniture create a relaxing effect, while the large sash windows allow in plenty of light. I could see passengers

making their way into the Eurostar terminal across the busy Pancras Road, but all was quiet behind the double-glazed windows. If you're feeling peckish before dinner, each floor has a walk-in pantry, where you can help yourself to drinks and snacks, and read the newspapers.

That evening, the ground-floor GNH bar, with its mirrored ceiling and crystal chandeliers, was really buzzy, but I had a drink in the more intimate, art-lined Snug Bar on the first floor. It leads to the restaurant – called Plum and Spilt Milk after the colours in the dining cars of the Flying Scotsman train – where the emphasis is on modern British classics.

After a peaceful night's sleep, I took breakfast at a civilised hour before ambling over to the Eurostar terminal, just two minutes away, suitably set up for my trip to Paris and beyond.

Simon Reynolds

Tel: 0203 388 0808

www.gnhlondon.com

Doubles from £249 including breakfast.

▲ ST PANCRAS RENAISSANCE HOTEL, London

If you're looking for a stylish stay close to the Eurostar terminal, you can't get any closer than the superb Renaissance St Pancras; indeed some rooms even overlook the railway platforms. The original hotel, designed by George Gilbert Scott, opened in 1873, when it impressed guests with such high-tech amenities as flushing toilets. Nowadays, after a ten-year restoration, the wow factor comes through high-speed internet, flat-screen TVs, pillow top mattresses, bathrooms and 24-hour room service. The former booking office is now a stunning bar and restaurant and with the hotel's spa, fitness room and swimming pool on offer the only hitch might be that with so much to enjoy, you end up missing your train.

Tel: 0207 841 3540

www.marriott.co.uk

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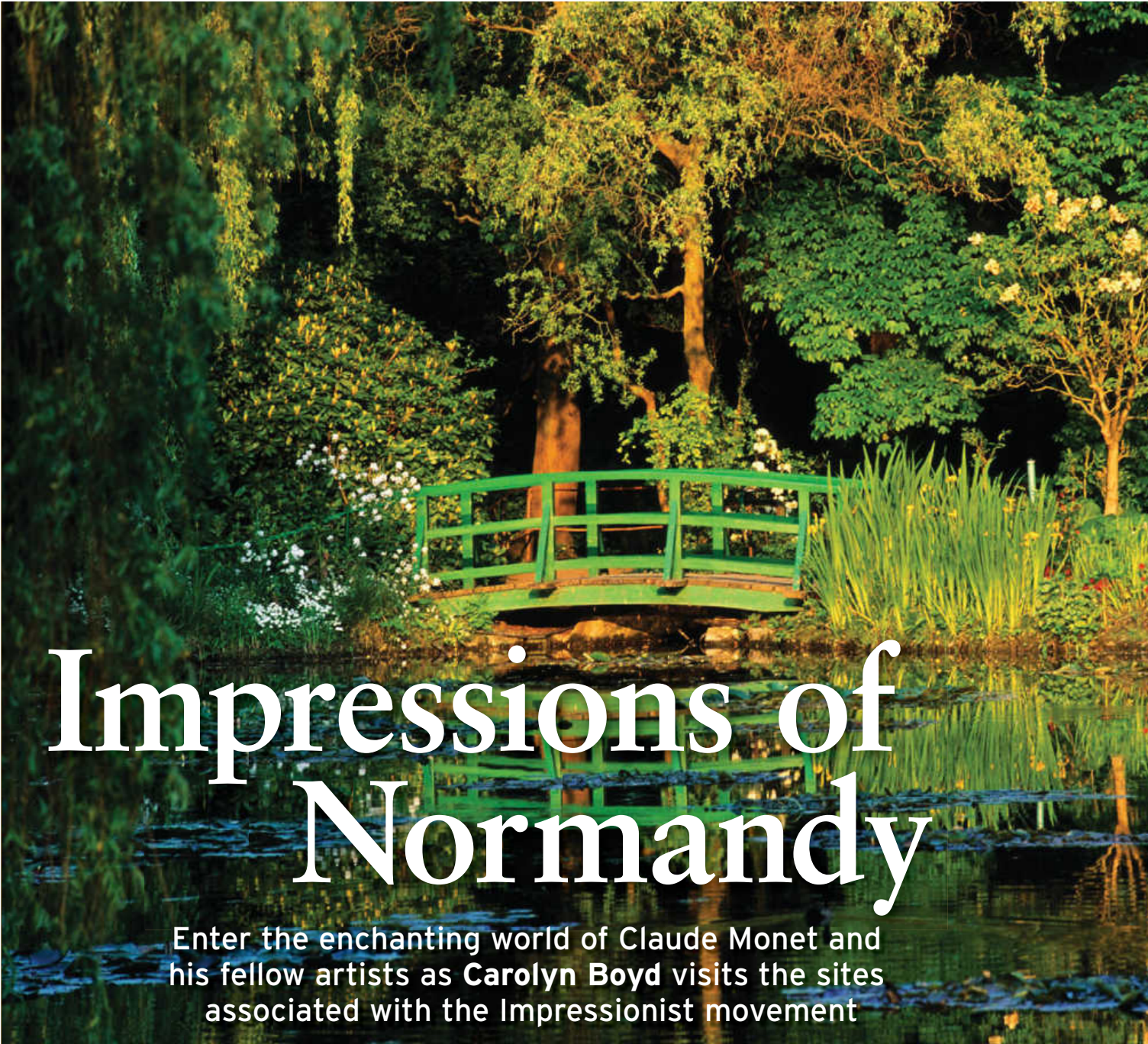


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Impressions of Normandy

Enter the enchanting world of Claude Monet and his fellow artists as Carolyn Boyd visits the sites associated with the Impressionist movement

For more than 150 years, different parts of Normandy have inspired artists of every genre, but it is the Impressionists who are best known for capturing it on canvas.

When a new railway from Paris opened up in the mid 19th-century, it allowed artists to travel easily from the capital to the coast and its fashionable resorts such as Dieppe, Trouville and Honfleur. They were drawn by the coast's special colour and light, which changed with each minute of the day. Up until then, artists painted mainly indoors, doing portraits and still lifes, and so it was something of a departure to have a new wave of artists painting outdoors and using softer techniques.

When Claude Monet painted *Impression, Soleil Levant* (*Impression, Sunrise*) at Le Havre in 1872, it gave the movement its name. For those wishing to take a tour, there are many sights to enjoy including Étretat, Giverny, Le Havre, Honfleur and Rouen, and with this year's Impressionist festival (see panel on page 45) there is no better time to do so.

ÉTRETAT

As I admire the towering cliffs of Étretat that inspired Monet and many other Impressionists, my main thought is that I can barely stand up. It's nothing to do with the local tipples of calvados and cider, or a poor choice of shoe, it's simply that the cliffs are so high and

so awesome that it is difficult to gaze upward when the large, round pebbles underfoot are shifting so much.

As I walk beneath the limestone giants, the swoosh of the incoming tide also threatens to knock me off my feet and, with the briny breeze tousling my hair, I can't help but wonder how Monet *et al* stood still long enough to capture this incredible scene on canvas. Once I return to the boardwalk above the beach and gaze out across the dazzling white sea, I can appreciate it more fully.

Back in 1885, when Monet painted the scene, a small information board tells me there were little red-sailed sardine fishing boats bobbing in the wash, but today a number of black-clad surfers are

PHOTOGRAPHS: BERTRAND RIEGER/HEMIS.FR; BERTRAND GARDEL/HEMIS.FR; FRANCIS CORMON/HEMIS.FR



waiting to catch some waves, and no doubt enjoy the view at the same time.

While the beach and boardwalk offer sensational up-close views of the cliffs (if you can stay standing!), to really enjoy their drama, it is best to walk up the path that leads to the clifftops. From here, on top of the first of the three iconic arches, you can see the beach and cliffs in panorama – the Chapelle Notre-Dame de la Garde perched on high in the distance. It's a wonderful sight, and little wonder Monet was so taken with this stretch of coastline that he painted it dozens of times, depicting various hours of the day, the fishermen and the changing nature of the sea.

For those wanting more information, the tourist office offers an audio walking tour, and there is also a series of panels placed along the Seine-Maritime *département's* coastline highlighting the different places in which the artists stood with their palettes and canvas.

GIVERNY

While Étretat is by far the most impressive natural location among the Impressionist sites, when it comes to naming the most iconic, it must be Giverny, Monet's garden. This house and garden was the residence of the artist from 1883 until his death in 1926, and it provides a wonderful insight into his life and work.

Arriving on a misty morning, and dodging the raindrops, I meet my guide, who leads me into the Clos Normand

part of the garden through a small green door in its periphery walls. As I follow her along the narrow paths, she explains that Monet intended part of the garden to represent a paint palette with different flower beds planted in one colour.

When we enter the house, again it is the colour that strikes you. Many of the rooms are decorated in only one colour, such as the bright yellow kitchen, the heart of the house. Elsewhere, I'm fascinated to learn that Monet was an avid collector of Japanese art, which was fashionable at the time (the most celebrated art work being Hokusai's *The Wave*), which explains more fully his desire to create the Japanese water garden.

Elsewhere in the house we come to his studio, which has been re-created from photographs to look almost identical to how it was in Monet's day, albeit with copies of the paintings that now hang in the world's most famous galleries. In among the paintings are photographs of his two sons, and his adopted family that came as a result of his second marriage to Alice Hoschedé, whose own daughter Blanche married Monet's eldest son Jean.

Blanche was something of an artist herself, and her paintings are strikingly similar to Monet's. A copy of her 1889 work *Haystack* hangs in what was once her bedroom. Following the deaths of both Alice and Jean, Blanche returned to Giverny to care for Claude Monet as his sight deteriorated, and she remained there until her own death in 1947.

The Japanese water garden is separate to the house and to reach it, we crossed the road, the route of which used to be a railway. It was from the train, en route between Paris and the coast, that Monet first spotted the Giverny house, before going on to rent and then buy it. The water garden itself is, even in inclement weather, something to behold.

While Monet's paintings are etched on most France-lovers' brains, to see the real inspiration is a special moment, and even more so once you hear how it was developed out of marshland. Streams were diverted to create the ponds, and Monet came up against local farmers who believed the exotic plants, brought from the east, would poison livestock. As we wander around the garden, peeking through the trees and flowers at the famous green bridge, it feels every bit the haven of peace that Monet intended. ➡➡



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Monet's Japanese garden at Giverny; The cliffs at Étretat; The house at Giverny



FROM LEFT: Honfleur's colourful harbour; Boudin paintings at Le Havre's MuMa Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux; The museum's striking exterior. **RIGHT:** Monet's paintings at Rouen's Musée des Beaux-Arts (exterior view, inset).

LE HAVRE

The town of Le Havre could not be more different from how it was in the late 19th century, when Monet painted the sun rising through its industrial chimneys. The bombings during World War II devastated the town, and its post-war concrete architecture designed by Auguste Perret became a World Heritage site in 2005. It's a curious place, but no less inspiring for its neat streets and uniform buildings.

On the seafront, the striking MuMa Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux is built in steel and glass, with a bold sculpture named 'the signal' outside. Inside, it is intended to resemble a boat, with ramps between levels giving the feel of gangways, and complete with a busty figurehead hanging above the doorway looking out to sea.

While much of the art is modern, the museum also has an impressive

collection of Impressionist works, from Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Édouard Manet, Alfred Sisley and Camille Pissarro. This is thanks in no small part to a donation from Hélène Senn-Foulds, the granddaughter of art collector Olivier Senn, which means that MuMa has one of the largest collections of Impressionist art in France. The gallery is a superb showcase for the paintings, with its bright, modern spaces, allowing you to enjoy the light (on a sunny day, at least) that so entranced these artists.

For me, the highlight was the entire wall of large and small artworks from Eugène Boudin over the mezzanine level. The small gold frames complement the paintings beautifully, and it was a pleasure to walk along, glancing into each little window to another world with bright blue skies, coastal scenes and harbour views.

HONFLEUR

The highlight of Honfleur is its colourful old harbour and the tall, narrow buildings, their bright awnings reflecting in the water. It is a setting I have seen hundreds of times, but vicariously through photographs and, while I knew it was pretty, I didn't realise how striking it would be. As I count the windows to see how many storeys there are – eight – my guide Anne Marie explains that each house is not one residence, but two; the lower part of the building has its entrance on the harbour-front, and the upper part is accessed from the street behind.

Yet however striking, it was the boats that were more of a muse to Monet, along with the smaller back streets and the wooden church. The Église Sainte-Catherine is France's biggest surviving timber-built church, and was crafted by shipbuilders after the original stone church was destroyed by the English during the Hundred Years War. It was only intended to be temporary, but it is still standing more than 500 years later. Its belfry was built separately; so the vibration of the bells wouldn't shake the church, or to avoid sparks from a lightning strike on the tower setting fire to the church, according to another theory. Despite its size, the interior of the church is wonderfully cosy, with a Christmassy air to it. The pillars around the side are oak trunks set on the original church's stone bases, while the roof is shaped like an upturned hull of a ship.

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Drink to the art of cider producers



For a trip with a more gastronomic slant, take a tour of the region's cider farms and calvados (apple brandy) distilleries, where you'll get to meet the locals, enjoy the produce and see a different side to life in Normandy. Holiday company Sawday's has put together a great trail combining its recommended accommodation with the places to visit. See www.sawdays.co.uk/discovernormandy for more information.

● Carolyn's feature on the trail will appear in an autumn edition of FRANCE Magazine.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ISTOCKPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; LUDOVIC MAISANT/HEMIS.FR; HÉRIVÉ HUGHES/HEMIS.FR; ROUEN NORMANDY TOURISM & CONVENTION OFFICE

Honfleur was the home of Eugène Boudin, who was born in the town in 1824. It was his paintings that I had so admired in Le Havre, and a museum dedicated to his life and works is a short stroll from the church in Honfleur. He was known as the 'king of the skies' for his dramatic landscapes, and he had a big influence on the young Monet. Inside, a good selection of his work is on display as well as works from the post-Impressionist era, from artists including Fernand Herbo and Henri de Saint-Denis. Away from the paintings, a stunning picture window allows you to gaze out towards the impressive modern bridge, the Pont de Normandie.

ROUEN

From the window of an underwear shop, which is now Rouen's tourist office, Monet painted some 30 impressions of the cathedral at all times of day and year, and in all weathers. It was a fascinating study in the impact of light on the same subject matter and was challenging even for Monet. By that stage (the 1890s) Monet was established in his career – though not revered enough for the ladies in the underwear shop not to object to his presence – and the task led him to have nightmares. "Things don't advance very steadily," he wrote to his wife, "primarily because each day I discover something I hadn't seen the day before... In the end, I am trying to do the impossible."

Not being a religious man, it wasn't the subject matter that most enthralled him, but the play of light on the Gothic facade. Monet entered the cathedral only once, and as I walk into the space, I can't help thinking that his nerves would have been calmed by doing so, such is the tranquil nature of its interior.

One of Monet's paintings of the cathedral – *Le Portail et la Tour d'Albane, Temps Gris* – hangs in the city's Musée des Beaux-Arts, which has a fantastic collection of art, including other works by Monet, as well as by Pissarro, Sisley and Renoir. When my guide and I stand in front of Sisley's 1893 *Chemin Montant au Soleil*, I am captivated by the painting and its glorious sunshine. It proves that, whatever the weather outside, there is always a bright scene to admire somewhere in Normandy.

● See page 46 for travel information. ➡➡



IMPRESSIONIST FESTIVAL

The third *Festival Normandie Impressioniste* takes place from April to September this year, celebrating the region's artistic heritage with around 450 exhibitions and music, theatre and dance performances.

This year's theme is 'portraits' and judging by the success of the previous two festivals, in 2010 and 2013, it is set to enthrall nearly two million visitors. Here's our pick:

A must-see event is *Scenes of Impressionist Life*, which is running from 16 April to 26 September at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen. Featuring more than 100 works of art, this exhibition will use Claude Monet's intimate painting *Méditation*, which depicts his first wife Camille sitting on a sofa, as a starting point for exploring the representation of Impressionist artists' private lives in their work.

Another major exhibition is *Being Young at the Time of the Impressionists*, at the Musée Eugène Boudin in Honfleur from 25 June to 3 October. The focus here is on youth in portraiture and the different ways in which it was evoked in paintings produced from 1860-1910, particularly in Normandy.

Meanwhile, Le Havre's MuMa

Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux is staging *The Studio of Light: Portrait of Eugène Boudin* from 16 April to 26 September. Featuring around 100 works, the exhibition compares the themes in Boudin's paintings with the thoughts and aspirations captured in his writings.

The Musée des Impressionnistes in Giverny focuses on a lesser-known artist of the period in *Gustave Caillebotte: painter and gardener*. The exhibition on this wealthy amateur painter, who is best-known for his garden scenes, is showing from 25 March to 3 July.

Concert highlights include the 5th Ravel meetings in the village of Lyons-la-Forêt, just east of Rouen, on 7 May, when dancers will interpret several Impressionist portraits, accompanied by music played on an Érard grand piano of 1875. On 16 September in the village of Bourghtheroulde-Infreville, also near Rouen, a show of popular songs will bring to life the *guinguette* dance venues painted by Renoir, Monet and Degas.

Peter Stewart

For more details on the festival, visit www.normandie-impressionniste.eu



The beach and cliffs at Étretat

Francofile *Follow the Impressionist trail in Normandy*



GETTING THERE

Carolyn travelled with Brittany Ferries from Portsmouth to Caen. For other routes, see page 23. One-way fares start from £79 for a car and two passengers, or just £30 for a foot passenger. Tel: 0330 159 7000, www.brittanyferries.co.uk Brittany Ferries can also arrange your hotel, *gîte* or campsite, see www.brittanyferries.com/holidays

WHERE TO STAY

Les Hautes Sources
32 Rue Roederer
27120 Ménéville
Tel: (Fr) 6 72 84 91 89
www.sawdays.co.uk
This beautiful bed and breakfast is run by charming young hosts Amaury and Audrey de Tilly, who rescued the manor house from ruin with creativity and ingenuity. It is 25 minutes' drive from Giverny. Rooms from €120.

La Petite Folie

44 Rue Haute
14600 Honfleur
Tel: (Fr) 6 74 39 46 46
www.sawdays.co.uk
A lovely *chambre d'hôte* with fabulously eclectic decor, run by American-born Penny and her French husband Thierry Vincent. It is within walking distance of Honfleur's famous old port. Rooms from £145.

Hôtel de Bourgtheroulde

15 Place de la Pucelle
76000 Rouen
Tel: (Fr) 2 35 14 50 50
www.hotelsparouen.com
This striking five-star hotel in the centre of Rouen is set in a 16th-century mansion with a facade that is worth admiring whether you're staying or not – a bas-relief depicts the

scene from the meeting of François I of France and England's Henry VIII at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Doubles from €185.

WHERE TO EAT

L'Étape Louis XIII

2 Route de la Barre en Ouche
27410 Beaufort
Tel: (Fr) 2 32 45 17 27
www.etapelouis13.fr
Take a little detour to the village of Beaufort to admire its château, and to eat a meal at this charming little restaurant. The calvados soufflé is worth the journey alone. It's a good place to break the journey from Caen to Giverny. Menus from €34.

L'Absinthe

10 Quai de la Quarantaine
14600 Honfleur
Tel: (Fr) 2 31 89 39 00

www.absinthe.fr

Established restaurant on Honfleur's famous port, serving seafood and haute cuisine. Menus from €25.80.

Restaurant 16/9

30 Rue Socrate
76000 Rouen
Tel: (Fr) 2 35 70 63 33
www.restaurant169.fr
Modern restaurant in the city centre. Menus from €18.90.

Restaurant La Couronne

31 Place du Vieux Marché
76000 Rouen
Tel: (Fr) 2 35 71 40 90
www.lacouronne.com.fr
Reputedly France's oldest *auberge*, established in 1345, where even Joan of Arc dined. Traditional food, with typically French service and atmosphere. Menus from €25.

WHERE TO VISIT

Fondation Claude Monet

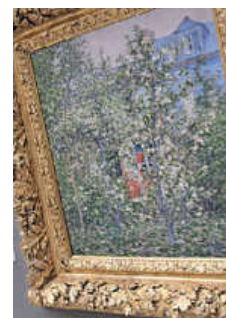
74 Rue Claude Monet
27620 Giverny
Tel: (Fr) 2 32 51 28 21
www.fondation-monet.com

MuMa Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux

2 Boulevard Clemenceau
76600 Le Havre
Tel: (Fr) 2 35 19 62 62
www.muma-lehavre.fr

Musée des Beaux-Arts

Esplanade Marcel Duchamp
76000 Rouen
Tel: (Fr) 2 35 71 28 40
www.mbarouen.fr/en



TOURIST INFORMATION: Normandy tourist board, tel: (Fr) 2 32 33 79 00, www.normandy-tourism.org; Seine-Maritime tourist board, tel: 2 35 12 10 10, www.seine-maritime-tourisme.com (or to find out where to follow the series of information panels, see www.seine-maritime-tourisme.mobi); Calvados tourist board, www.calvados-tourisme.co.uk

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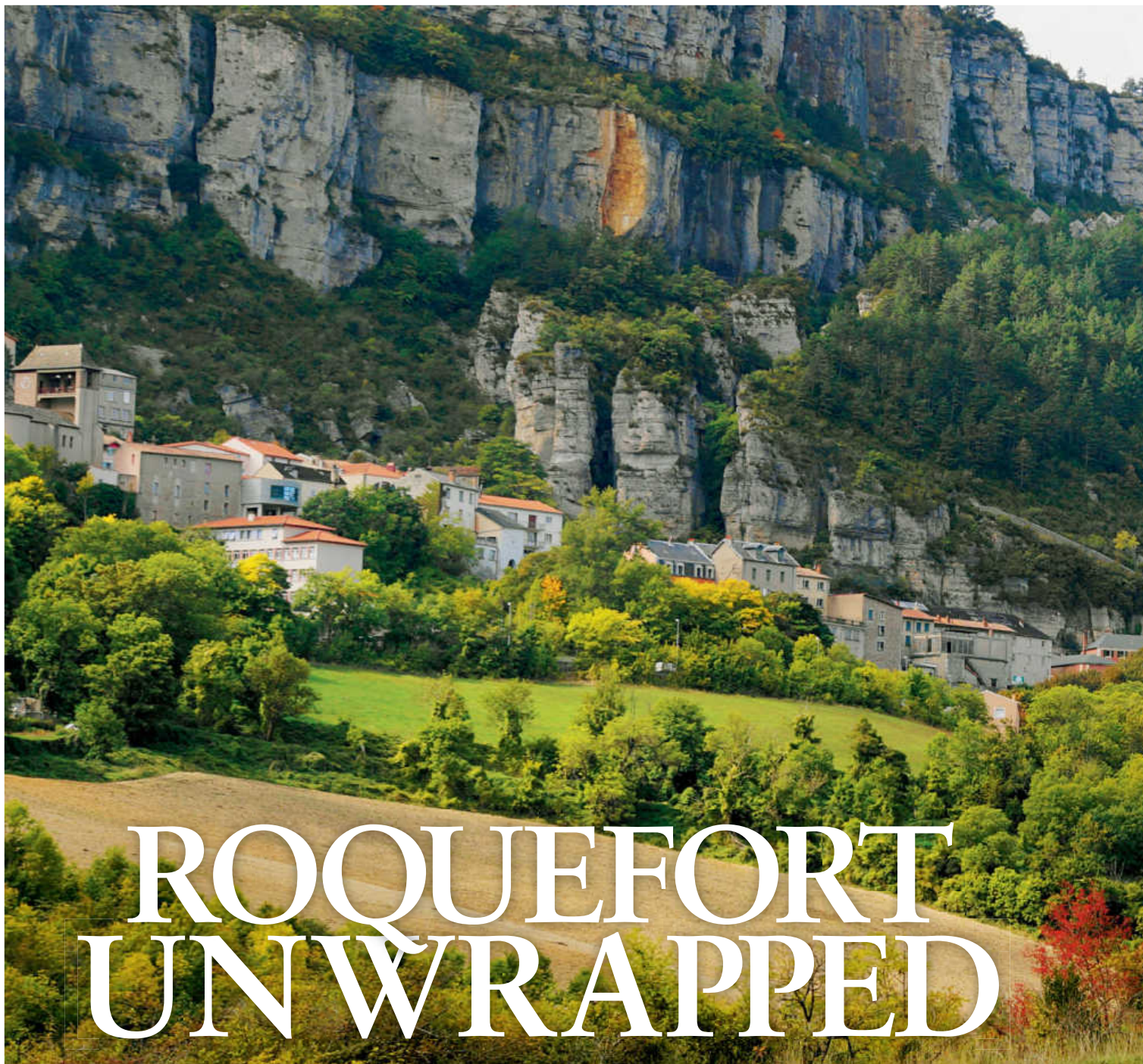


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Owner/Operator



Deep in Aveyron, **Ray Kershaw** explores the history of a legendary cheese and visits the caves that hold the secret to its worldwide success

We are lounging near the summit of what may be the one and only authentic magic mountain. The air rings with bell-like birdsong; calls of courting cuckoos are echoing in the crags. At 800 metres, the warm spring sunshine of Aveyron is beaming on our picnic of bread, cheese and wine.

We have climbed past house-sized boulders, skirted foliage-filled fissures, bizarrely shaped limestone pillars and half-hidden grotto mouths. The torn landscape seems primeval, scarcely touched by time, yet this fractured escarpment of the Combalou mountain made the village far below us renowned around the world. Another slurp of Côtes de Millau and another tangy bite of the illustrious cheese whose source my wife Alice and I have

come to find, and we are ready to believe that Roquefort's legend may be true.

Once upon a time a shepherd boy was snacking on bread and cheese in one of the caves. Espying a pretty shepherdess, he cached his meal and darted off to woo her. Over whether romance blossomed, legend draws a veil, but returning some weeks later the boy recalled his hidden cheese. Though it was riddled with blue veins the lad risked a bite. His astonished "*Magnifique!*" may have been gastronomy's supreme eureka moment. *Penicillium roqueforti* – the microscopic fungi spores of the Combalou caverns – had wrought their first alchemic wonder: the peasant food of Aveyron had been transmuted into an ambrosia fit for tempting gods and future kings.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: ALICE KERSHAW



MAIN PICTURE: The village of Roquefort and the Combalou mountain; RIGHT, FROM TOP: Ray enjoys a tasting at Caves Gabriel Coulet; Cheeses at the Caves Carles ready to eat



charter of 1437 made the Combalou caves a protected zone. As annual production soared to 60,000 kilograms, insatiable demand spawned inferior fakes. The Toulouse Parliament's 1666 law enforced the rule that genuine Roquefort came solely from the caves. The planet's first AOC – *appellation d'origine contrôlée* – remains in force today.

We are staying at Saint-Affrique, a pretty market town on the River Sorges ten kilometres from Roquefort-sur-Soulzon. Sheltered by the Grands Causses cliffs, with lively restaurants and cafés, it is an ideal centre for exploring the region. Nearby is Pastoralia, an engrossing museum that tells Roquefort's story from its prehistoric origins to today's high-tech laboratories. Pastoralia is run by a farming college whose students come from every continent. We cuddle a fetching Lacaune ewe, the ancient breed that exclusively provides Roquefort's milk.

All milk must come from *le rayon* (the radius), a legally defined 130-kilometre circle with Roquefort at its hub and taking in corners of six *départements*: Aveyron, Aude, Gard, Hérault, Lozère and Tarn. Nearly 2,000 farmers tend 900,000 ewes. Each ewe's milk makes 40 kilograms of Roquefort a year. The strictly regulated milking season, governed by the rhythm of conception, gestation, lambing and lactation, is December to July. Lambs are born in November; the best females become dairy ewes and the males become suckling lambs – Roquefort *agneau de lait* is an expensive gourmet speciality.

The bronze ewe's fountain outside Saint-Affrique town hall celebrates their paramount past and present importance to the Grands Causses economy. The wool is internationally prized; the supple hides made nearby Millau the one-time capital of glove making. Some makers survive; their hand-sewn gloves bearing labels such as Dior or Givenchy. But it's still tiny Roquefort that turns their cheeses into gold. ➡➡

No other named cheese approaches its antiquity. It predates, yet belongs to, France's first recorded history. A six-millennia-old cheese-making vessel is in the village museum. Julius Caesar may have acquired the taste when battling Vercingétorix in the Land of the Arverni. The naturalist Pliny the Elder wrote in 76AD, "The cheese is Rome's most esteemed."

When the village was fortified around 400AD people called it Rocca Forta, meaning 'strong fortress'. Thus 'the cheese from Roquefort's caves', as medieval scribes wrote in 1070, became history's first brand. It is recorded that Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of the Franks, had demanded two mule loads to be delivered every Christmas to his distant palace in Aix-la-Chapelle.

The medieval Order of the Knights Templar built fortified villages on the limestone plateaux of Larzac's Grands Causses to shelter pilgrims heading for Rome. The Knights' regulations governing ewe's milk and cheese set Roquefort apart. A royal

The village itself, viewed from across the River Soulzon, appears as elemental as the earthquake-sculpted cliffs. The buildings seem to have emerged organically. Yet the visible village is like the tip of an iceberg: a portal to tortuous subterranean labyrinths divided today between seven makers (once there were 40) that range from small family firms to the giant enterprise Société des Caves, whose cheese sells around the world. But though their caverns sometimes meet and all seven make classic Roqueforts, each is as nuanced and distinctive as a *Grand Cru* wine.

The caverns' age-old secret is the natural ventilation – the fissures and vents known as *fleurines* that weave down from the surface and circulate the *penicillium*-rich air. Bread placed in the caves soon crumbles to green powder. One gram is sufficient for 100 cheeses; a single grain contains billions of spores. Every blue cheese on the planet is turned blue with a strain of *penicillium roqueforti*, granddaddy of them all.

The fresh cheeses undergo their metamorphosis in the perpetual darkness beneath the Combalou

Yet strangely no cheese is made in Roquefort itself; the makers have dairies spread across the *rayon* where unpasteurised milk is dosed with cave-grown *penicillium* during the curding. After several days of salting, the fresh cheeses all come to Roquefort to undergo their metamorphosis in the perpetual darkness beneath the Combalou. The milk-white discs, resembling unearthly spectral faces in the gloom, are living organisms. When two weeks old, blue-veined to the core, the foil-wrapped cheeses mature for a further three to 18 months, depending on the brand's required final flavour.

For Roquefort aficionados the village combines the lure of El Dorado with the sybaritic bliss of the land of milk and honey: the only place in the universe – unless Heaven has a *fromagerie* – where it is possible to taste every brand from every maker. We elect to visit three very different firms: all equally passionate; each guarding secrets; each making sublime cheese.

Delphine Carles, *maître d'affineur* (master cheesemaker) of Caves Carles, continues the family tradition of making cheeses by hand. With just seven employees, the limited production of Carles's single brand makes it a rarity. It headlines in favoured international restaurants, and French celebrities and politicians send for their quotas. Alas, Delphine won't drop names. While the going's good, we grab our ration too.

Roquefort's other family firm, Gabriel Coulet, has been winning gold medals since 1872. Jean-Pierre Laur is the fifth-generation-owner. His 97 employees learned their skills from their parents; the milk has come from the same farms for 100 years. Coulet's four brands are distinguished by their ages: from the spring-fresh tangy zest of the three month-old Petite Cave to the sophisticated nuttiness of the 18-month-old mature Castelvieu. Jean-Pierre supplied this chefs' favourite to Presidents Chirac and Mitterrand. President Hollande, he thinks, is not a Roquefort man. Jean Pierre's expression suggests he did not get his vote.

The Coulet caves plunge into tangled tunnels connected to the underground estates of the Société des Caves, founded in 1842 and one of France's oldest companies. The 1,300 employees produce four million cheeses a year. Space-age laboratories have made production a science, yet its business still depends on the magic in the rock.

In historic caverns with evocative names such as the Cave Saint-Jean and Cave des Templiers, thousands of cheeses recede dimly into darkness. We glimpse the shadowy figures of the *maîtres d'affineur*, who have absolute authority over when their ripening charges may be released into the light. In one gigantic cavern the Roquefort legend is dramatised in a dazzling and deafening son-et-lumière.

A Société tour is one of France's great adventures and, if that weren't enough, at the end we get to savour – fresher than we've ever tasted it before – the best-known brand of all: the green-foil-wrapped original, its sole exported variety, loved around the world. Two other brands – Cave des Templiers and Cave Baragnaudes – are 'blued' with variant *roqueforti* strains that Société scientists detected in the caves. Picking the winner demands extensive sampling, but the trio's ranking remains too close to call. Out of fairness, or gluttony, we invest in all three.

We rest our reeling tastebuds by taking a day to drive around the Larzac region's five frozen-in-time fortified villages built by the Knights Templar. All exude antique quaintness but the stars are La Couvertourade, a miniature Carcassonne resembling a fairy-tale film set, and Sainte-Eulalie-de-Cernon, their ramparts as intact as if built yesterday. Roquefort's dramatic hinterland comprises the inexhaustible wonders of the Grands Causses natural park, a Unesco World Heritage site of timeless hamlets and villages, river gorges, peaks and caves.

Our most memorable walk is the near-vertical ascent of the Combalou escarpment on the *Sentier des Échelles* (Footpath of Ladders). After negotiating a maze of giant boulders and a vertiginous cliff traverse, we scale two metal ladders and unexpectedly pop up like Jack from his beanstalk into a pristine world in the sky. The broad summit plateau is undulating pastureland chequered with green woods. Protected by crags, too inaccessible for grazing today, it may once have been home to those venerable ewes whose milk made the first Roquefort. We find a ruined *bergerie* where shepherds lived with their flock, lowering their cheeses down the precipice to be ennobled in the caves.

The ewes are Roquefort's aristocracy. In the hamlet of Hermilix we are formally introduced to the four hooved woolly queens. The Ricard family have been breeding milking flocks for seven generations. After 40 years, Alice and Jean-Louis are half-surrendering their crooks to their son Julien. Daughter





ROQUEFORT TIPS

- When buying Roquefort, if the cheese has been cut, check that the body is white. If browning at the edges, it may still be delicious but it won't be at its peak. If it's very brown and oozing, ask for another or try another shop.
- Store in your fridge salad drawer in its original foil using extra foil to cover the cut. Don't leave too long.
- Bring to room temperature at least an hour before serving to release its flavours and unctuous consistency.
- Slice from the centre as if cutting a cake; eat from the rim towards its core. The flavours change subtly.
- A robust but mellow red wine, such as an old Cahors or a Châteauneuf-du-Pape, accompany it well, but a dessert wine and Roquefort, the tanginess and sweetness deliciously bonding, is a union blessed by heaven.
- A smidgeon of Roquefort turns simple sauces into gastronomic feasts and transforms a *gratin dauphinois*. See our *Bon Appétit* section on page 82 for more Roquefort recipe ideas.

Sylvie breeds ewes too; their other son, Christophe, works in Société's laboratory. They have Roquefort in their veins.

In the subdued golden light of the hour of evening milking, Alice leads us to the *lavogne*, one of the historic stone-lined dewponds that make farming on the Causses possible; rainfall is otherwise swiftly swallowed by the limestone. The Ricards don't know who built their ancient *lavogne*, but when Alice walks alone here she reflects that she is treading the same track along which shepherds led their flocks for millennia.

She begins a lilting sing-song cooing, as ethereal as a curlew's call or a pastoral air from Canteloube. Out of the deepening dusk, 500 ewes begin to arrive; at first in twos or threes – some pausing to drink at the *lavogne* – then in a flood of auburn fleece. It is one of those rare moments you know will remain imprinted on your soul. Bucolic is a word often used inaptly; this is what it means. The Ricard family eat Roquefort every day. Alice is renowned for inventing new dishes. Having every brand at hand, she has favourites for each recipe but is too diplomatic to divulge which she prefers.

In Roquefort they swear that when Brillat-Savarin, the father of gastronomy, wrote his famous aphorism, "A dessert without cheese is like a beautiful woman lacking one eye" that he indubitably meant Roquefort. Casanova believed it was an aid to seduction. The philosopher Diderot regally crowned it, "The king of cheeses", an 18th-century slogan that is still doing the business in Fifth-Republic France.

So which brand is best? Having tasted them all, we're fully fledged connoisseurs. No contest really. The champion of champions is always the one you have melting on your tongue.

● Turn to page 52 for travel information. ➤

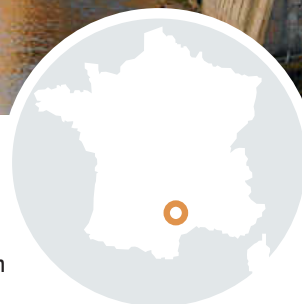


THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Ewes pause at the *lavogne*; Milk producer Alice Ricard; Part of the ancient labyrinth of the Société des Caves; **FACING PAGE:** Thousands of fresh cheeses ripen in the Société's caves





ABOVE, FROM LEFT: The village of Roquefort; The market town of Saint-Affrique



Francofile *Follow your nose on the Roquefort cheese trail*

GETTING THERE

P Ray travelled on P&O's overnight route from Hull to Zeebrugge, a handy shortcut to France from the north of England and Scotland (tel: 0871 664 2121, www.poferries.com). Roquefort is about an 8hr drive from the northern Channel ports. See page 23 for more travel information.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Résidence le 1837
1 Impasse Carnot
12400 Saint-Affrique
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 97 63 30
www.le1837.com
Located in a town-centre mansion within an enormous park, this hotel has luxurious studios and suites, all with kitchenettes, plus a heated outdoor pool and an ultra-modern spa. Studios from €148, suites from €175, breakfast €10.

Château des Creissels

Place du Prieur
Route de Saint-Affrique
Creissels
12100 Millau
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 60 16 59
www.chateau-de-creissels.com
Imposing 12th-century, crag-perched castle with

stunning views of the Millau Viaduct from the garden poolside terrace. The cellar restaurant serves a five-course menu (€36.50) in which every dish derives from Lacauene sheep. Elegant rooms and suites from €84, breakfast €11.

WHERE TO EAT

La Table de Jean
7 Boulevard Émile Trémoulet
12400 Saint-Affrique
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 49 50 05
Michelin and Gault & Millau listed restaurant with a cosy and informal atmosphere. Young chef Jean adds Mediterranean flavours to the Grands Causses cuisine. Menus from €25.

Les Fleurines

Rue des Baragnaudes
12250 Roquefort-sur-Soulzon
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 62 38 94
Take lunch in a vaulted cave that penetrates the Combalou escarpment or on a terrace with a view. Robust local dishes based around Roquefort are

lovingly prepared by Marlène and her father Serge. *Plat du jour* €11.50.

FOR AN APÉRO

Le Café du Jardin
63 Boulevard de Verdun
12400 Saint-Affrique
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 49 19 81
Bustling bar and brasserie with a covered terrace facing the market.

WHERE TO VISIT

Société des Caves
Avenue François Galtier
12250 Roquefort-sur-Soulzon
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 58 54 38
www.visite-roquefort-societe.com
Guided tours including an underground son et lumière take around 90 minutes. Open all year, adults €5, children €3, under-11s free. Its restaurant serves imaginative Roquefort-based dishes.

Caves Gabriel Coulet

3 Avenue de Luras
12250 Roquefort-sur-Soulzon
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 59 24 27
www.gabriel-coulet.fr

Open all year, admission free to the upper-level caves; a short film tells the Roquefort story. The shop sells local specialities in addition to the firm's four Roquefort brands.

Caves Carles

6 Avenue de Luras
12250 Roquefort-sur-Soulzon
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 59 90 28
www.roquefort-carles.com
The caves of this Roquefort producer are too small for public visits, but tastings are free.

Pastoralia - The World of Ewes

La Cazotte
Route de Bournac
12400 Saint-Affrique
Tel: (Fr) 5 65 98 10 23
www.pastoralia.fr
Interactive exhibition about the region and its sheep. A great place for children to cuddle Lacauene ewes and, during the summer holidays, make their own cheese. Open daily mid-March to November, adults €4.90, children €3.

FARM VISITS

Four producers offer visits to see ewes at milking. Visits begin at 4pm, €5.50 for adults, €3.50 children. On certain days Alice Ricard offers cheese and ewe's milk tastings plus recipe demonstrations. Book through Saint-Affrique tourist office (tel: (Fr) 5 65 98 12 40, www.ot-dusaintaffricain.com).

Knights Templar Village Circuit

The 80-kilometre circuit takes in five walled villages: Saint-Jean d'Alcas, Le Viala-du-Pas-de-Jaux, Sainte-Eulalie-de-Cernon, La Cavalerie and La Couvertorade. Medieval re-enactments are held during school holidays and on certain weekends (www.conservatoire-larzac.fr).

Roquefort walks

Allow three hours to explore the Combalou escarpment, using the map and brochure from Roquefort tourist office (tel: (Fr) 5 65 58 56 00; www.roquefort.com).



REGIONAL TOURIST INFORMATION: Aveyron tourist board, tel: (Fr) 5 65 75 40 12, www.tourisme-aveyron.com; Midi-Pyrénées tourist board, tel: (Fr) 5 61 13 55 55, www.tourism-midi-pyrenees.co.uk

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A cycling ODYSSEY

Experience a ride along France's Atlantic coast through the eyes of caricaturists Simon and Sheba Cassini

Last summer, caricaturists Simon and Sheba Cassini cycled the *Vélodyssée* bike route down the Atlantic coast of France, drawing their most amusing moments as they went.

At the time, *FRANCE Magazine* featured their account on our Facebook page as they made the 1,200-kilometre journey from Roscoff in northern Brittany to Hendaye near the Spanish border, and then to Santander to take the ferry back to the UK.

While they expected to enjoy the excellent cycle paths, the food and wine and the company of their friends who joined them for parts of the route, what did surprise them was to discover the love affair

between the French and the humble bicycle, and to experience the joy of taking their time to see some of the most charming corners of France.

For more information about riding the *Vélodyssée*, visit www.velodyyssey.com. The website helps you to plan the journey divided into 14 stages (see map, pictured right). The site offers maps and GPS, as well as practical advice and information on all aspects of making the journey. The *Vélodyssée* (part of *Euro Vélo 1*) is one of several dedicated cycling routes across the country, which link up various themes and well-known sites. See page 58 for our pick of the others.





ABOVE: Simon and Sheba Cassini during their *Véloodyssée* cycle trip; **LEFT:** A map of the route from Roscoff to the Spanish border and (inset) the *Véloodyssée* logo;

MAIN PICTURE: Cyclists check the information board at the port of Pornic in Loire-Atlantique

SIMON AND SHEBA'S STORY

As we cycled up the hill out of the port of Roscoff straight from the Plymouth ferry, we had no idea quite what was in store for us. The official *Véloodyssée* route is described as: "A route over 1,200 kilometres long with specially adapted cycle trails in both directions. It crosses four regions and ten *départements* in France and 80 per cent of the itinerary is on designated car-free cycle lanes."

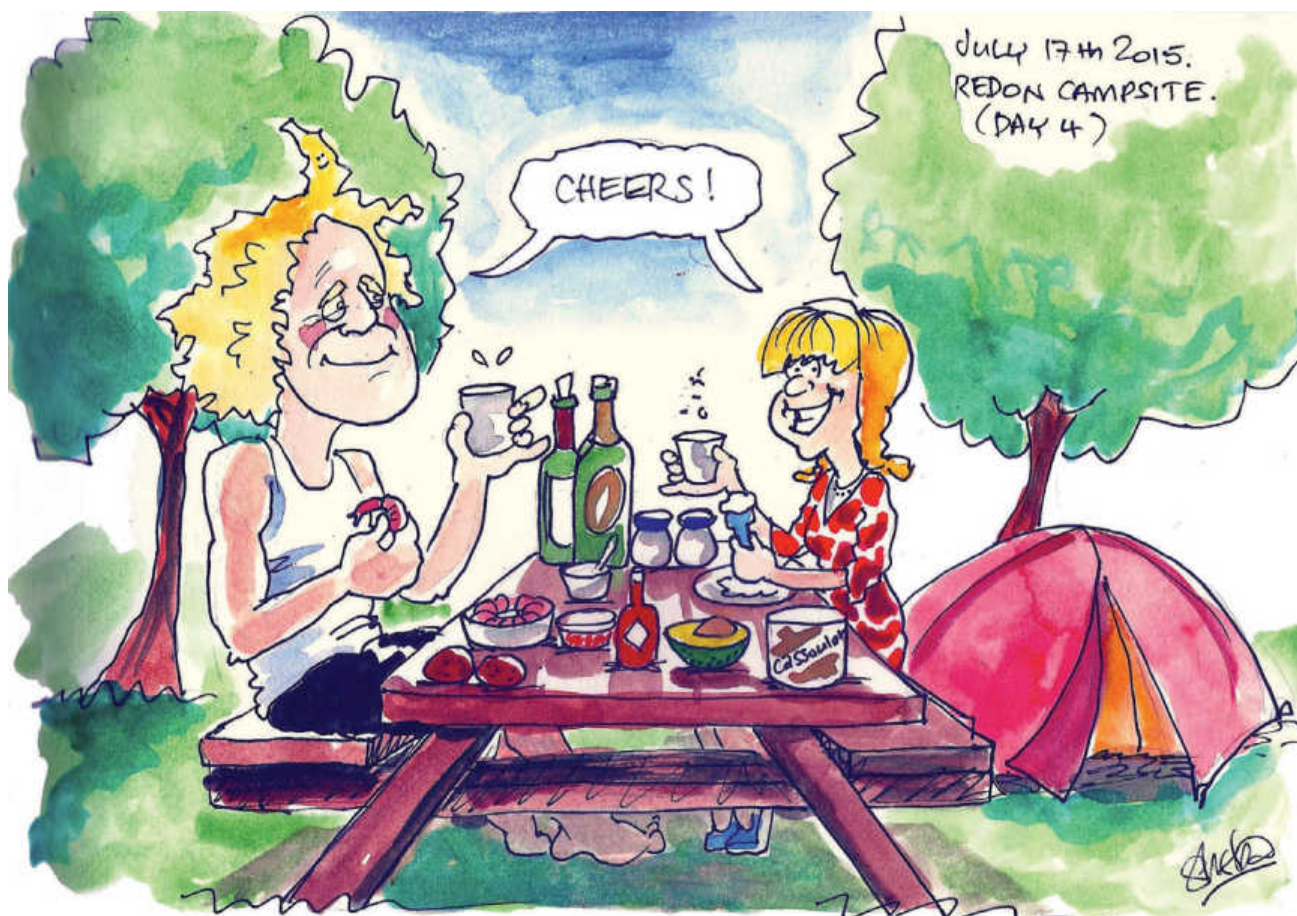
At that stage, though, we had no idea where even to find the start of the trail.

We needn't have worried; within the first half a mile there was one of the little bike logos that would become so familiar, pointing us down a deserted side-road. Within ten minutes we were cycling on a track alongside a field of artichokes, through a little bit of woodland and down a narrow footpath at the back of someone's house; it seemed like a strange route to cross a continent.

But this is the *Véloodyssée*: for the next month, we followed it for miles, along the side of canals, along empty, meandering trails, past fields of sunflowers, seeing otters swimming in the rivers and herons whirling above us. We rode on sun-dappled, deep red and gold pine-forest tracks and winding coastal paths, passing huge sand dunes and the edge of the Atlantic all the way to the Spanish border.

For the first five days, until we reached Nantes, we cycled on about half a mile of actual road and at every junction, when we wondered which way to go, there was one of the cheery little signs pointing the way.

If you have ever wondered why the French love bikes and cycling so much then this route may give the answer; even when the track takes you through towns or alongside roads there is a designated car-free cycle lane. At junctions, motorists actually ➡



YOU KNOW YOU'RE MIDDLE CLASS WHEN YOU'RE CAMPING AND YOU BUY: PROSECCO, PRAWNS, TABASCO, PASSION FRUIT, CASSOULET, CRAB TERRINE, AVOCADO, LUMPFISH CAVIAR ...AND A NICE BOTTLE OF BORDEAUX.

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Some of the many cartoons drawn by Simon and Sheba Cassini detailing their experiences riding along the *Vélodyssée*

stop to let you cross and show – especially to London-hardened cyclists like us – an extraordinary patience, tolerance and willingness to share the road.

For much of the way, you are sharing the route with pedestrians, not one of whom ever ‘tuts’ at you for cycling on the path. Shared footpaths are the norm here, not the exception.

As a result you pass entire families – often with children as young as three or four years old – tootling along on their own bikes with their own little panniers, clearly going a long way, as they are miles from the nearest town. So a love of cycling is instilled into the national psyche from an early age. Everyone does it and everyone loves it. Cyclists are respected and appreciated, and it is clear that money is spent on making the experience safe, friendly and enjoyable.

Of course, it wasn’t all straightforward: we missed a few signs, but soon realised the route didn’t feel right and so we retraced our steps until we were back on track. In Cap Breton, the route took us on a pretty, but circuitous, route twice round the town, and somewhere in the centre of Bayonne the signs disappeared completely, leaving us, for the first time, contending with dusty city traffic until we regained the coast. But in a 1,200-kilometre ride these were pretty minor setbacks overall.

Cyclists are respected, and money is spent on making the experience safe, friendly and enjoyable

We did the trip from mid-July to mid-August, the peak holiday season in France. We camped the whole way, but only once did we arrive at a campsite to be told it was *complet*. On that occasion another site two kilometres down the road had space for us. After that, we made a point of stopping no later than 5pm to be sure of finding a vacancy in one of the numerous and well appointed sites dotted all down the Atlantic coast.

And why not? To us, the key to cycle touring is to take it easy and do on average 50 miles a day at most. You’re not really trying to get somewhere – you’re trying to be somewhere. Give yourself time to relax, have a swim and watch the sunset with a bottle or two of the wonderful and cheap *vins de France*.

If you find yourself somewhere you love, stay an extra day. Take side trips; we loved the Île d’Oléron off the Charente-Maritime coast and stayed there.

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS: SIMON AND SHEBA CASSINI

Don't be put off by the daunting ride over the bridge, where a massive side-wind threatened to blow us 200 feet into the sea below. The buzz at getting safely to the other side was worth every minute.

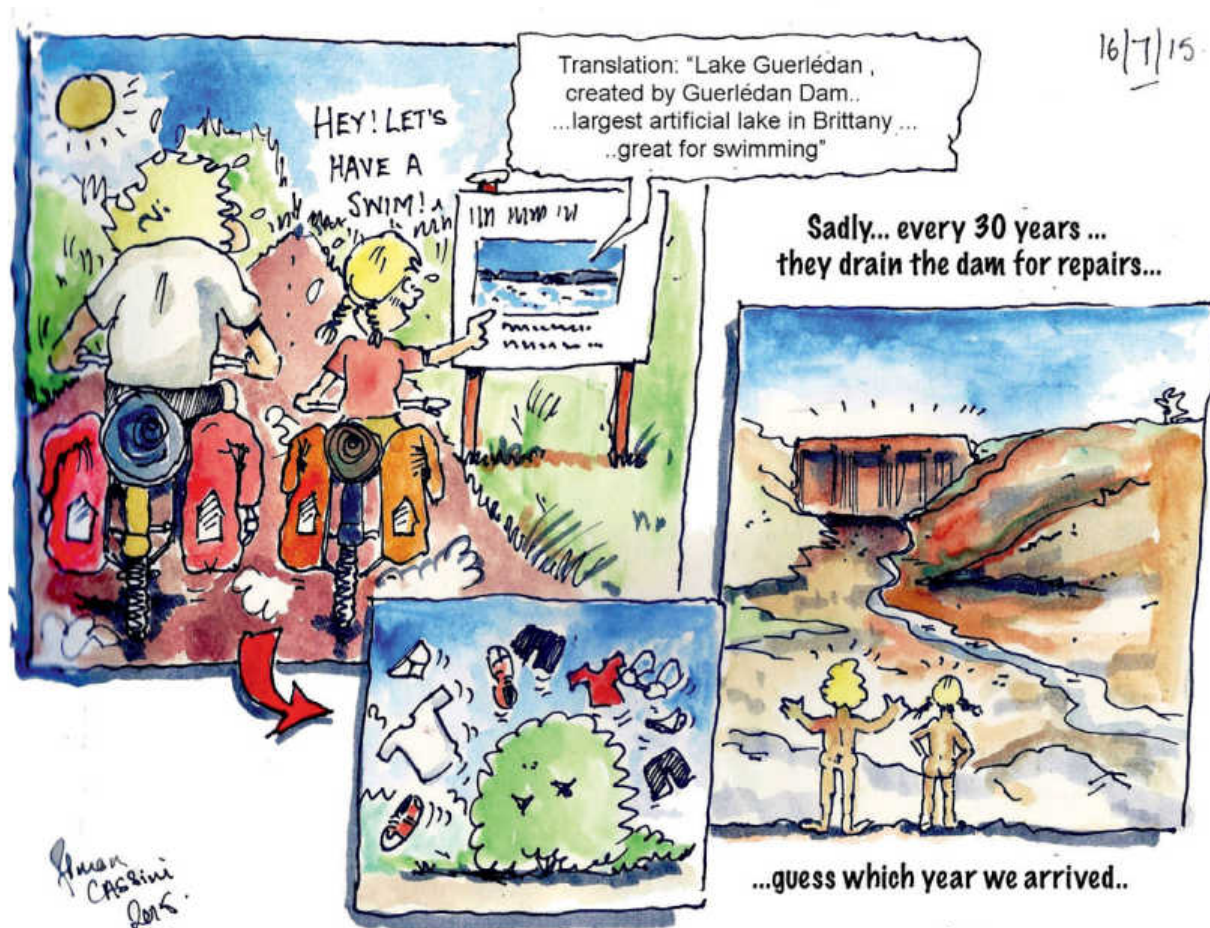
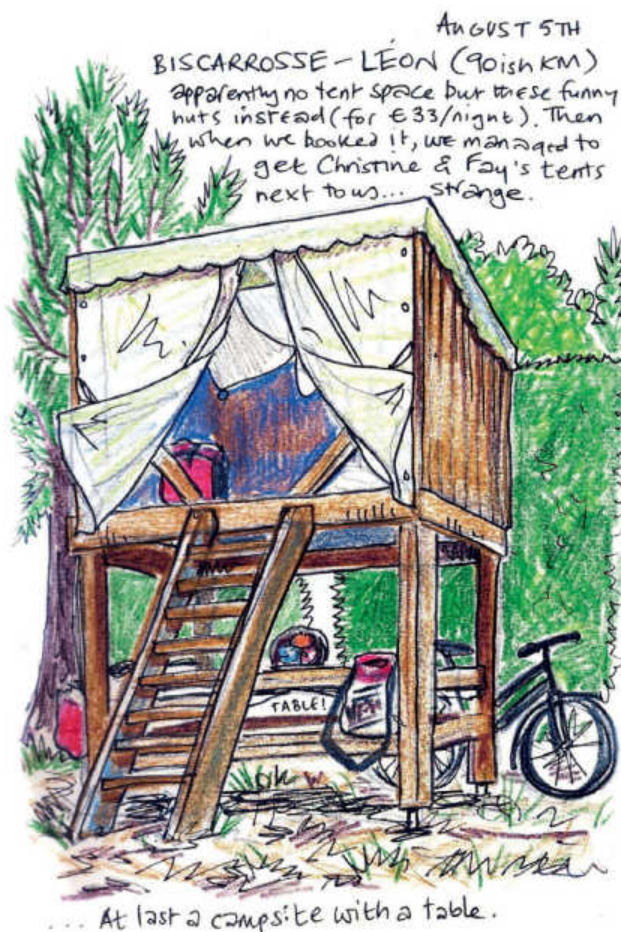
Leisurely lunches featured strongly too, though getting the legs working again on the afternoon stretch always took a little effort. If you're in a hurry; get a car.

Our trip ended in San Sebastián just over the border in Spain. From there we took the train to Santander for the overnight ferry home. As ever, our urge was just to keep going. Apparently the route continues on all the way to Portugal (though I think less well managed and signed than the French stretch), but that will have to wait for another day.

The highlights? Too many to list, but arriving at a Camping Municipal somewhere in Brittany after a long, hot, dusty day along miles of empty canal paths, to be greeted with three ice-cold mango juices from the lovely manager made our day.

The beautiful medieval towns in the north are outstanding, and the pine forest tracks along the Atlantic coast of Landes south of Bordeaux are just sublime.

It was a ride that just kept on giving. Eat your heart out The Netherlands; France does cycling as well as anyone. Thank you, the French. ➡➡



OTHER FRENCH CYCLE TRAILS TO TRY



Véloscenic

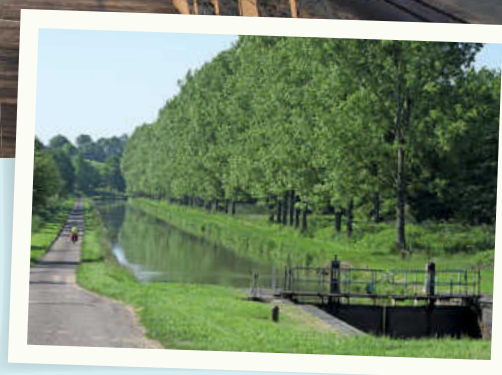
The *Vélodyssée* trail down the Atlantic coast is one of many cycle routes that criss-cross France. Another popular choice is the *Véloscenic*, a 450-kilometre cycle trail created in 2012 that connects Paris with the abbey island of Mont-Saint-Michel (pictured above) in Normandy. This well-signposted route passes through beautiful countryside including the little-known Chevreuse Valley south of Versailles and the apple and pear orchards of the *Bocage Normand*, as well as the city of Chartres with its immense Gothic cathedral. Cyclists of all abilities can enjoy this trail, which contains long stretches of the car-free *voies vertes* (green ways). www.veloscenic.com

Loire à Vélo

This 800-kilometre trail through the Loire Valley, which attracts more than 800,000 riders a year, never ventures too far from the river and passes through a wealth of tourist sites. Highlights include the vine-clad slopes of Sancerre, the châteaux of Sully-sur-Loire (pictured right), Villandry and Azay-le-Rideau, the tufa-limestone town of Saumur and the port of Nantes, where the trail ends. A railway line runs along the river from Orléans and there are around 20 stations with cycle access, so it is possible to join and leave the trail when you want. www.cycling-loire.com

Tour de Manche

UK cyclists looking for something closer to home should try the *Tour de Manche*, a 1,200-kilometre route linking Brittany and Normandy with south-west England. The trail begins in the ferry port of Poole in Dorset and continues for 150 kilometres along the Jurassic Coast and through the Devon countryside to Plymouth, where cyclists take the ferry to Roscoff in Brittany. The trail then travels along the Côte du Granit Rose and Côte d'Émeraude before reaching Saint-Malo. From here the route runs parallel with the shorter Petit Tour de Manche up the Cotentin Peninsula to Cherbourg and the ferry back to Poole. <http://en.tourdemanche.com>



Tour de Bourgogne

Explore medieval villages and taste some of the world's greatest wines by cycling a section of the 800-kilometre *Tour de Bourgogne*. There are six linked trails including the *Canal du Nivernais* (pictured above) and the *Voie des Vignes*, which begins in Dijon and passes through famous *appellations* such as Nuits-Saint-Georges and Puligny-Montrachet. www.la-bourgogne-a-velo.com

EuroVélo 3

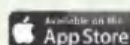
See France in all its diversity on *EuroVélo 3*, also known as the *Véloroute des Pèlerins* (The Pilgrims' Route), which stretches from Trondheim in Norway to Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain. The French leg begins in Jeumont on the Belgian border and moves through Île-de-France, the Loire Valley, Poitou-Charentes and the Bordeaux vineyards before joining *EuroVélo 1* in Bayonne. The 151-kilometre Orléans to Tours section is the only French part to be fully signposted so far, but more are expected to be marked out by the end of 2016. www.francevelotourisme.com 🚲

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
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SURF'S UP

Fifty-something novice **Paul Miles** learns how to ride the waves with the elite in the European surfing capital of Biarritz ➤

PHOTOGRAPH: MATHIEU THOISY

Surfing the waves off the coast of Biarritz





ABOVE FROM LEFT:
A lone surfer on the Grande-Plage; Paul's friend Andy (left) gets advice from surfing instructor Pol Plantec; A beach café above the Côte des Basques; The Musée de la Mer and Aquarium; The lighthouse from the Port des Pêcheurs;
BELOW: The Biarritz coat of arms

Look ahead! Don't look down! Just relax!" the orders from Pol Plantec, my surf instructor are coming thick and fast as he – standing chest-deep in the sea off Biarritz – grips the front of my board. Magically, the wave I have been awaiting starts to carry me towards the shore. This time I don't lose control, I ride the power of the surf.

"Now stand up!" I hear Pol shout, his words almost lost to the roar of the ocean.

Call it mid-life crisis if you must, but I am in my fifties and have never learnt to surf. I love water – being in it, on it or near it – but apart from a childhood afternoon on a plywood board that rammed hard into my stomach, I have never surfed; not the stand-up, arms outstretched like a magician who has cast off his cape type of surfing, anyway.

It is a story proudly told by surfing residents of Biarritz that Europe's surfing history began here, on the Atlantic coast of France. In the 1950s, American screenwriter Peter Viertel, husband of the British actress Deborah Kerr, was scouting locations for a film adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. He was so impressed by the waves on the Basque coast that he arranged for his surfboard to be sent from California. To the amazement of local people, he rode the rollers on his long board. "*Pour quelques amoureux de la mer qui le regardent ébahis, c'est le début d'une fantastique épopée,*" it says in the town's museum and aquarium ("For the few sea-lovers who were watching in awe, it was the beginning of a fantastic epic"). The museum has a new sister institution, La Cité de l'Océan, a fabulous wave of a building, like a huge skateboard

park, full of interactive video exhibits about the world's oceans. I found the flesh and blood of the museum and aquarium more entrancing, however: seals rolling and twirling gracefully as they swam past the window of a huge tank.

Such pinniped grace is a quality that eludes me as I try – again – to stand up. I am immediately catapulted into the foaming briny and twirl underwater, twisting up in the elastic leash that attaches my ankle to the board. I surface, laugh at my ridiculousness, point the 9ft-long soft board back out towards the waves and wade out to try again.

{ I try again to stand up and am immediately catapulted into the foaming briny

My friend, Andy Whitehouse, who is 53, and I are sharing a 90-minute taster lesson with two Austrian teenagers, who have been learning for a week. They seem to be doing fine and have even started surfing 'the green' – waves that have not yet broken. Pol has been surfing since he was 13. "Perhaps it's too late to start to learn?" I had asked him earlier, wavering about the whole idea while he sized me up for a wetsuit and boots so I wouldn't succumb to hypothermia in the 14°C seas, chilled from a long winter. "It's never too late," he smiled, his sea-green eyes glinting. "I taught a 65-year-old man how to surf; he and his grandson," said Pol, as he passed me a bundle of black neoprene. Surfing is very good for muscle development and





BIARRITZ

posture,” he said. “As long as you don’t have any back problems, that’s the main thing.”

As the European surfing capital, Biarritz attracts the world’s best, but it is also a great place for novices, especially on the Côte des Basques beach. You have sweeping views along to the Spanish coast and the backdrop of the Pyrénées, and plenty of no-nonsense or trendy café-bars (Côte 57 and Le Surfing). Most importantly, the waves are said to be ‘technically’ perfect. “It’s my favourite break in the world,” enthused a visiting Brit, Angus Murdoch, as we watched a surfer. “It’s a right-hand point break,” which means the wave always breaks at the same place and moves to the right, he explained. “It’s a reliable and gentle wave: great for a learner.”

Angus, visiting Biarritz in a campervan with his surfboard, is not a young dude just out of college; he is 48 and learnt to surf when he was 35. “The only regret – in all my life – is that I didn’t learn when I was about ten,” he said, wistfully.

Our lesson started on the sandy beach, once the tide was out. Dressed head to toe in neoprene, we lay on our boards while Pol showed us how to paddle out to a wave and how to go from lying position to standing: a yoga-like movement that he demonstrated so fluidly it was like a dance; unlike our attempts, which seemed more like a broken jack-in-the-box. Pol made me stand on the sand and then pushed me to see which foot I had instinctively put forward first – to work out whether I would lead with my left or right foot, or, in the best surf-ese – whether I was ‘regular’ or ‘goofy’. “But don’t think too much,” he said. “Just relax and don’t fight the wave.” ➡

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Explore Basque cuisine

If you prefer consuming calories to expending them, this corner of the Basque country, where France meets Spain, is rich with choice.

At the newly refurbished Halles de Biarritz indoor market you can slurp breakfast oysters shucked for you at Sarl l’Écaillerie (tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 06 72) or tuck into a Basque gâteau (cherry or cream) from the charming Ogi Ona (tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 82 55). From here, it is only a step across a small road to Bar Jean (5 Rue des Halles, tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 80 38, www.barjean-biarritz.fr), which is famed for its tapas (pictured below) using ingredients from the market.

In complete contrast to all this rustic fare and informality stands the Hôtel du Palais (1 Avenue de l’Impératrice, tel: (Fr) 5 59 41 64 00, www.hotel-du-palais.com), the *grande dame* of Biarritz’s hotels and the most imposing building on the seafront. Dinner menus in the opulent Villa Eugénie restaurant start from €95 and mains such as roast rack of lamb and confit shoulder from €42.

For a modestly priced three-course lunch (from €20), try Le Sin (1 Avenue de la Plage, tel: (Fr) 5 59 47 82 89, www.le-sin.com), a coolly Scandinavian-style restaurant at La Cité de l’Océan. You might dine on hake in salsa verde or Castillian shoulder of lamb with a thyme jus. For a similar price, treat yourselves to an evening out at Le Clos Basque (menus from €26, 12 Rue Louis-Barthou, tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 24 96), a Michelin-listed restaurant specialising in Basque cuisine where you can dine outside on a pretty terrace. For a more informal meal with sea views, Le Surfing (see *Francofile* for contact details) has sharing platters (Basque cheeses, black cherry jam and *pain de campagne* €15), gourmet burgers and vegetarian dishes.

If it is picnic provisions you’re after, arguably the best bread in town is to be found at Le Fournil du Rocher (60 Rue Gambetta, tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 86 76). Visit the market for fruit and cheeses and Miremont (see *Francofile* for contact details) for indulgent pastries.





ABOVE: The Église Sainte-Eugénie seen from the Grande-Plage

Andy and I had been preparing mentally for this lesson; not by watching YouTube clips of groms tube riding (translation for fellow over-50s: 'not by watching videos on the Internet of young surfers riding inside the hollow of a wave') but – more suited to our years – by checking in to the luxurious Miramar Hotel with surf views.

At night, we slept with our balcony doors open, the roar of waves filling the room. The hotel has a thalassotherapy treatment centre and heated seawater pools, indoors and out, but the wild sea on a grey day was more invigorating than any paid-for pummelling. The wetsuits kept the cold at bay and the thrill of the surf and the craziness of it all made me laugh out loud into the wind and rain.

"This is the best thalassotherapy!" cried Pol, as waves crashed over our heads. "In summer the water can be as warm as 28°C and we only wear 'shortie' wet-suits." The downside is more crowded waves and more spectators. Thankfully, in the cold and rain, there was no one but our little group to witness my ungainliness.

Exhilarating rush

Our time was almost up and the heated seawater pool and steamy hammam at the Miramar were beckoning. I could stop whenever I wanted. "One last go," I thought as I waited for a wave. It carried me off with an exhilarating rush. I could hear Pol shout. I stood up and then positioned my feet as he had shown me. Finally, I was riding a wave.

When I surfaced from the inevitable denouement, Pol gave a thumbs-up and a broad grin. Needless to say, having succeeded once, albeit briefly, I wanted to try again. And again. Eventually, the lesson was over. "Last one!" declared Pol and, sadly, I wiped out, as we surfers put it.

After enjoying hot showers and a beer in Côte 57, we walked back along the seafront in wind and rain that made us shiver more than the surfing. We warmed up in the steam of the tiled and arched hammam. Later, at tapas bar Puig & Darro, we drank Navarre wine and demolished a dozen tasty morsels, many made with Basque ingredients, such as spicy xistora sausage and Ossau-Iraty cheese.

Santé! Or *Topa!* as they say in Basque. Look ahead! Don't look down! Here's to riding waves! 🌊

Francofile

Test the waters at Biarritz, Europe's surfing capital



GETTING THERE

By train: Paul travelled from London to Biarritz via Paris through Voyages-sncf.com (tel: 0844 848 5848, www.voyages-sncf.com, return fares from £121). *Turn to page 23 for other travel information.*

SURFING LESSONS

Hastea surf school
Plage de la Côte des Basques
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 6 81 93 98 66
www.hastea.com
1hr 30min lesson with Pol Plantec as part of a group €35, private lessons €80 an hour. Lessons can only take place three hours either side of low tide, so check times in advance. If you have back problems, consult your doctor first.

WHERE TO STAY

Paul stayed at:
Le Miramar
13 Rue Louison Bobet
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 41 30 15
www.sofitel.com
Modern, and luxurious thalassotherapy spa hotel with large balconies overlooking the beach and an open-air heated seawater pool. Doubles from €131.

Also try:
Hôtel Maison Garnier
29 Rue Gambetta
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 35 46 57 72
www.hotel-biarritz.com
Charming seven-bedroom hotel in a 19th-century villa. Doubles from €70.

Youth Hostel

8 Rue Chiquito de Cambo
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 41 76 00
www.hihostels.com/hostels/biarritz
Modern hostel with garden 2km from the town centre. Beds from €22 in dormitories of two to ten beds.

FOR AN APÉRO

Le Surfing
9 Boulevard du Prince de Galles
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 78 72
www.lesurfing.fr
Café-restaurant looking over the Côte des Basques beach, with outdoor and indoor seating and surfing-themed decor.

Côte 57

Boulevard du Prince de Galles
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 22 27 83
www.cote57.com
Next to Le Surfing, with similar views and seating but with a more restrained and darker wood decor.

WHERE TO EAT

Paul ate at:
Puig & Darro
34 Rue Gambetta
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 23 30 45
Small, popular tapas bar with snacks from €1. Point out your choices and they are delivered on a slate. Limited pavement seating.



TOURIST INFORMATION: Biarritz tourist office, tel: (Fr) 5 59 22 37 00, www.tourisme.biarritz.fr

Also try:

Saline

62 Rue Gambetta
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 43 65 98
Intimate bar-restaurant specialising in ceviche, the marinated fish dish. Three courses from €30.

Miremont

1 bis Place Georges Clémenceau
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 24 01 38
www.miremont-biarritz.com
Famous *pâtisserie*, founded in 1872. Tea and cake from €10.

WHERE TO VISIT

Musée de la Mer-Aquarium

Plateau Atalaye
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 22 75 40
www.aquarium-biarritz.com
Closed Mondays in winter. Admission €14.50.

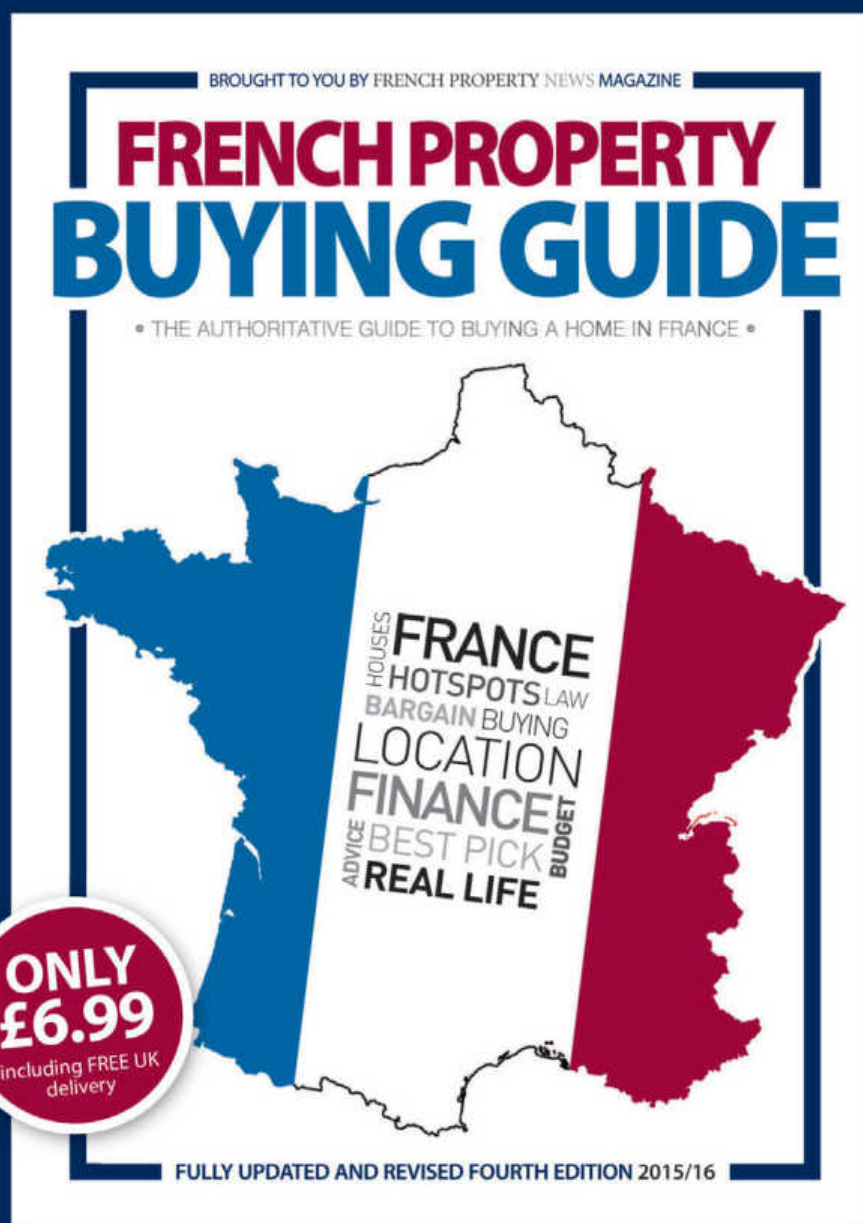
La Cité de l'Océan

1 Avenue de la Plage, la Milady
64200 Biarritz
Tel: (Fr) 5 59 22 75 40
www.citedelocean.com
Closed Mondays in winter. Admission €11.50. Combined ticket with museum €18.50.

Biarritz Big festival, 9-17 July

Annual music festival that attracts big names such as Johnny Hallyday and Iggy Pop (www.bigfest.fr).

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FOOT DOWN FOR LE MANS

On a classic car tour to the home of endurance racing, **Paul Lamarra** gets a taste for life in the fast lane

Sitting in the bar of the Hôtel de France in La Chartre-sur-le-Loir, I had the uneasy feeling that I was about to be exposed as an imposter. For this grand hotel, lying 50 kilometres to the south-east of Le Mans, is inextricably linked with that city's famous 24-hour motor race – and I prefer cycling.

In the 1950s, British motor racing engineer John Wyer and his Aston Martin team began using the hotel as their Le Mans base, and other teams followed suit. Famous names such as Stirling Moss and Derek Bell have been guests, and the actor Steve McQueen stayed here while making *Le Mans*, a 1971 film about the race.

At any moment I feared that someone in the throng of hard-core classic car enthusiasts who had gathered to experience something of the atmosphere of the legendary race would point at me and declare: "You're not a petrol head, you're one of those pesky cyclists." When asked about the merits of a "straight six-cylinder engine", I nodded sagely and repeated, "Yes the straight six – can't beat it."

Pictures of winning cars and their distinguished drivers adorned the walls; the dining room floor had a black and white chequered floor designed to imitate the winner's flag, and a music duo at the back were belting out, "Get your kicks on Route 66". ➤➤



Paul gets a passenger's-eye view of the classic car enthusiasts driving up to the Dunlop Bridge on the Le Mans track

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL LAMARRA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Hôtel de France has long been a magnet for classic cars; Paul's view in the MGC as it drives along the circuit near the pit stops and stands; A burgundy and cream Alvis at the track; Photographs of cars and drivers adorn the bar of the Hôtel de France

This was more than nostalgia; this was immersive time travel back to an era when these enthusiasts' cars were race winners and the drivers were sporting gentlemen. Although cars of any vintage don't really do it for me, I was lured by the romance of the 24-hour race and also the recent marking-out of the world's first Grand Prix circuit to the east of Le Mans.

The next morning, on the square in front of the art deco and ivy-covered hotel, the sun had yet to clear the rooftops and although it promised to be a perfect day, it was cold enough to induce another shiver in my already trembling body. The drivers were keen to get started and they stood chatting in a group while their lizard-like E-type Jaguars, Porsches, Aston Martins and a beautifully maintained burgundy and cream Alvis warmed up their engines for the drive north to Le Mans and a chance to experience the famous circuit.

While the engines throbbed, the cool air held the smell of unburned petrol. It was a surprisingly evocative experience, which transported me back to my childhood and the days before quiet, efficient engines and catalytic converters.

My co-driver, Maitland Cook, a long-time Le Mans enthusiast, was ready to introduce me to our classic model. It was the open-topped sports car that I had never had; a 1968 racing green MGC. As soon as I sat behind the wheel I was that original lucky chap driving off the forecourt and into the London of the swinging sixties. I had moved back to a time before I was born; clearly I was getting in the mood.

Maitland knew how to increase that mood still further. For him this is a regular trip down memory lane that has never lost its appeal. He has been attending the Le Mans 24 Hours since 1962 and has not missed a race since 1974. From 1967 to 1971 he worked for John Wyer as a purchasing manager in the UK and came out each year to be part of the team. He was there in 1969 when Wyer's outfit won the race by only 300 metres with a Ford GT40. "John Wyer's philosophy was that you had to



finish the race to win the race; he kept the drivers to strict lap times and, sure enough, the Porsches all dropped out," said Maitland as I attempted to pull out of the square.

"Right," he said changing suddenly into race mode, "I want you to imagine that it is race day and we are the mechanics taking the cars up to Le Mans." What with the engines revving, the petrol-suffused air and the parade of classic cars around the tiny square, it was easy to believe in that scenario. Struggling to find reverse but managing not to crunch the gears, I took a deep breath and fell into line.

In Maitland's day, a sympathetic *gendarmerie* turned a blind eye as the mechanics indulged in their own race. However, organisers had warned us that cars going at excessive speeds could end up being confiscated by the police. Nevertheless, there were still bends to test driving skills and mistakes to be exploited while we remained within the 90km/h (56mph) speed limit.

In the unfamiliar open-topped car and with the wind in my ears, it felt as if we were hurtling across the landscape of wheat



My co-driver flicked the overdrive switch and I knew then that the car had plenty more to give

fields, low hills topped with woodland, isolated châteaux and long stretches through pine forests that were ripe for overtaking. My co-driver clearly thought I was going too slowly and urged me to accelerate faster. Reaching across, he flicked the overdrive switch and the revs dropped; at that moment I knew that this 50-year-old car had plenty more to give.

Inevitably, I was overtaken and the other drivers gave me a quick grin as they passed. In cars of all shapes and sizes it was more Wacky Races than Le Mans but the competition was keen and, had someone told me that testosterone smelt of petrol, I would have believed them.

The French countryside has a timeless appeal for classic car enthusiasts and there is a growing awareness of the potential for this type of holiday across France, and not just in the Sarthe countryside around Le Mans. "It is so easy to get across from the UK and the roads are empty," Thomas Brimblecombe, the event organiser, had told me over dinner in the Hôtel de France the night before. "France is a country that lends itself to driving."

"On another trip we drive down to participate in the *Circuit des Remparts* in Angoulême, passing through the Vienne *département* and the village of Angles-sur-l'Anglin. It just all fits – the classic cars, driving across the village's stone bridge and the castle backdrop; it is beautiful."

As well as the 24-hour race, the city also hosts the biennial Le Mans Classic, where cars that once competed, or similar models, can race once again on the famous 13.6-kilometre Circuit de Sarthe. Much of the racetrack is on public roads that are closed for the 24-hour race and the Classic. We joined near the Tertre Rouge, a vicious right-hand bend that race cars somehow tackle at 160km/h, and headed south on a six-kilometre stretch of the D338 known as the Mulsanne Straight, where their speeds can reach 330km/h, more than 200mph.

Although it was an ordinary Saturday morning and traffic was heavy, I could detect hints of the road's other purpose. Crash barriers lined the road in places and there were stretches of purpose-built track that avoided the roundabouts. As I drove, Maitland successfully conveyed a sense of what it might be like to drive through the night at more than 300km/h on a road that seemed much too narrow for the purpose. To add to the risk in those pre-health and safety days, spectators dined in roadside bistros while the cars sped past.

After a guided tour of Le Musée des 24 Heures, which displays 100 cars from the race's 93 years, we went through a gate, into a tunnel and out on to the track itself by the pit stops and between the stands. "This is what makes Le Mans special," whooped Maitland, "it's big, the grandstands are big and it still gives me a buzz like it did 50 years ago."

"You are so tired at the start and when it begins you still have 23 hours and 59 minutes to go, but if you are involved you don't feel tired during the race itself, although you could fall asleep at any moment." After driving up to the Dunlop Bridge, one of the most famous landmarks in motor racing, we completed one lap of the smaller Bugatti track. A safety car kept us in check, but then moved aside just long enough for everyone to take their chance and floor it. Indeed, what a buzz.

Instead of going off to lunch with the others, Maitland and I made our own fuel pitstop and went off in search of the route of the first Grand Prix, which was held in 1906. In motoring's early years, racing had taken place on open roads and caused huge loss of life, so it was decided to hold an international race on a 65-kilometre circuit of closed roads.

Driving the original route called on Maitland to imagine a new scenario: this time we were in goggles and cloth caps and driving a 12-litre, one-ton beast that could achieve a modest 70mph at a push. Although not entirely sure of our bearings, we opted to go in a clockwise direction from the start line, marked by a specially built tunnel that linked the stands with the pits on the D323. ➡➔

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Cyclists take turn in 24-hour spotlight

Despite some animosity between motorists and cyclists, the Bugatti circuit at Le Mans has, since 2008, been given over to cyclists for one weekend each August (20-21 in 2016) for an endurance event organised on similar lines to the Le Mans 24 Hours. Unlike the car race, cyclists can compete solo or as part of a team of up to eight riders. Each team is free to decide on its own strategy to complete the 24-hour race.

For amateur cyclists it is the ideal opportunity to experience the atmosphere of a big race. Electronic timing lets you know where you are in the running, in case you are interested. Each lap is just over four kilometres long and a stiff climb towards the Dunlop Bridge is followed by a long downhill.

Last year around 5,000 cyclists from 12 countries were cheered on by around 15,000 spectators (tel: (Fr) 2 43 21 13 24, www.24heuresvelo.fr).

● Read Lynette Eyb's feature about the event in our July issue.



ABOVE FROM LEFT: The classic car enthusiasts at the Dunlop Bridge; Francis Piquera, director of the Musée des 24 Heures, with a poster depicting the first race, in 1923

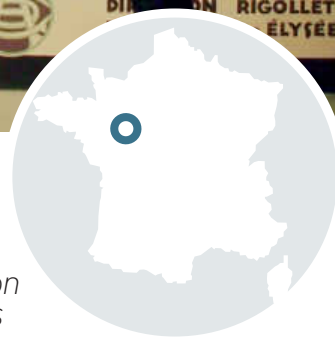
Just before 6am on 26 June 1906, mechanics and drivers pushed 32 cars out on the track and the race began. Within minutes they would have been presented with their first sharp turn on to the D357 for the long straight towards Saint-Calais and into the rising sun.

On the long uphill to Bouloire we could tell, even in our relatively modern MGC, that it was a challenging route. Once again we were slowed by the speed limit and roundabouts, but there was no need to hurry on this bright autumn day. The road was lined with hedgerows on the turn while the leaves on the poplar trees were already a deep yellow.

Recently 11 so-called totems have been placed along the route, and we decided to stop at each one to read up on the background to the race. We discovered that residents in the small towns of Saint-Calais and Vibraye had objected to cars being driven at 70mph on their narrow streets, which led to temporary wooden plank roads being built so racers could avoid the town centres. The Vibraye plank road was 700 metres long and so narrow that passing was impossible.

Each lap was 105 kilometres long and drivers had to complete 12 laps over two days. Without the help of back-up teams, many dropped out after suffering punctures on the rough roads. Only 11 cars finished the race, which was won by the French-based Hungarian Ferenc Szisz, driving a Renault, who took a respectable 12hr 14min at an average speed of more than 100km/h. The fastest lap was completed in 52min 25sec. We didn't even come close.

It had been a tiring day driving an old car that lacked power steering and an automatic choke, so I wasn't altogether sorry to return to my little red Vauxhall Corsa. The meaning of 'straight six' still eluded me, but I was confident that my petrolhead credentials had at the very least been enhanced. 🏁



Francofile

Soak up the atmosphere on a motoring trip to Le Mans

GETTING THERE

Paul's Le Mans trip was arranged with Classic Grand Touring (tel: 01483 281 282, www.classicgt.co.uk) in conjunction with Brittany Ferries (tel: 0330 159 7000, www.brittanyferries.co.uk). A four-day package to the Hôtel de France costs £399pp, based on two in a car sharing a room. This includes two nights' half-board, return ferry crossing with overnight cabin on the outward journey, picnic lunch, wine tasting and châteaux pass. The tour operator can arrange classic car hire, which costs around £1,000 per week.

WHERE TO STAY

La Ponce Secrète
2 Rue des Coteaux
72340 Ponce-sur-le-Loir
Tel: (Fr) 6 61 16 03 88
The charming Nicole runs this small

collection of converted outhouses built against the chalk cliffs next to the River Loir. Rooms €70 including breakfast.

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT

Hôtel de France
20 Place de la République
72340 La Chartre-sur-le-Loir
Tel: (Fr) 2 43 44 10 16
www.lhoteldefrance.fr
Apart from the track itself, nowhere captures the spirit of Le Mans 24 Hours better than this hotel. The 22 bedrooms are done out in art-deco style, with doubles from €78. Dine at the hotel's Relais du Ronsard and have coffee by the fireside in the bar, menus from €29.

WHERE TO VISIT

Le Musée des 24 Heures - Circuit de la Sarthe
9 Place Luigi Chinetti
72100 Le Mans

Tel (Fr): 02 43 72 72 24
<http://musee24h.sarthe.com>
Trace the evolution of the cars racing at Le Mans since 1923 and see the drivers' hall of fame at this modern museum near the entrance to the circuit. Admission €8.50.

Domaine Gigou
4 Rue des Caves
72340 La Chartre-sur-le-Loir
Tel: (Fr) 2 43 44 48 72
www.gigou-jasnieres.com
Family-run cave producing the local, little-known Jasnières and Coteaux du Loir wines.

RACE DATES

Le Mans 24 Hours is being held on 18-19 June this year (tel: (Fr) 2 43 40 8000, www.24h-lemans.com) and the Le Mans Classic on 8-10 July (www.lemansclassic.com).



TOURIST INFORMATION: Sarthe tourist board, tel: (Fr) 2 43 40 22 50, www.tourisme-en-sarthe.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: PAUL LAMARRA



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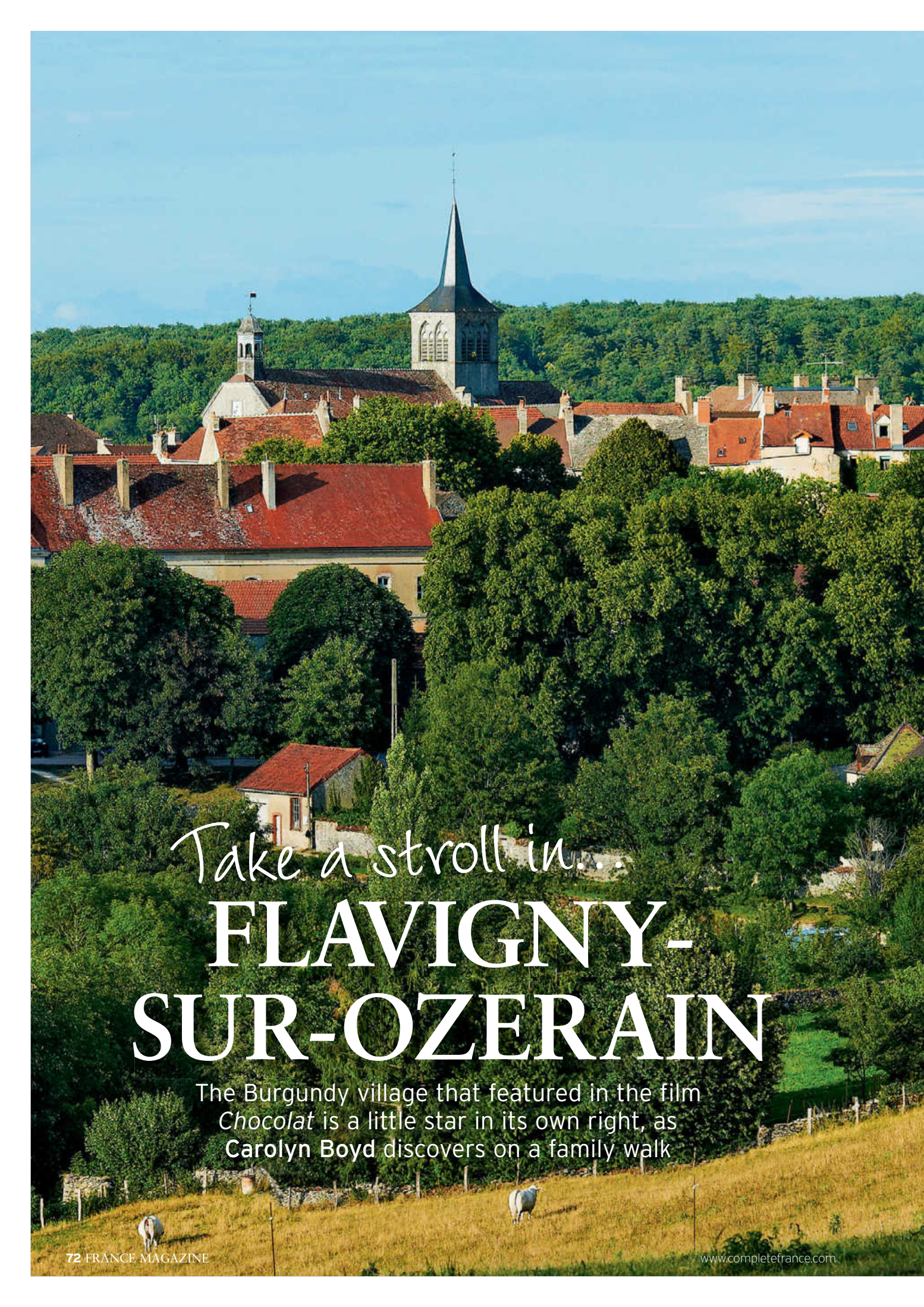
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Take a stroll in...

FLAVIGNY- SUR-OZERAIN

The Burgundy village that featured in the film *Chocolat* is a little star in its own right, as Carolyn Boyd discovers on a family walk



The village of Flavigny-sur-Ozerain in Burgundy

Here's a question that you won't often get asked about France: what do Johnny Depp, aniseed imperials and an order of Benedictine monks have in common? The answer may already be obvious to fans of Lasse Hallström's 2000 film *Chocolat*, based on Joanne Harris's novel, but for the others the answer is Flavigny-sur-Ozerain. While this beautiful hilltop village in Burgundy found fame most recently as the backdrop to Johnny Depp and Juliette Binoche's star turns, Flavigny has a much longer story to tell.

Its first chapters feature Julius Caesar, who set up a hospital camp on the site during the battle of Alésia in 52BC, but the first permanent settlement came thanks to the Benedictine abbey, which was founded here in 719AD. This is the first large building you come to when entering the village via the Place des Fossés, opposite the car park on Jard Sous La Ville.

Here, a delicate aroma pervades the air, as the small factory inside produces the village's most famous export – the Anis de Flavigny flavoured imperials. These sweets, presented in little oval tins, can be found throughout France, but nowhere else have I seen the variety of flavours on offer in its home village.

Symbol of love

As we entered the shop, which leads to the coffee shop-cum-bookshop, we admired the confectionery products beautifully arranged on wooden shelves. On a central table, a display of several huge bowls, with both large and tiny imperials, invites visitors to try each flavour of sweet: aniseed, blackcurrant, lemon, orange blossom, ginger, tangerine, mint, liquorice, rose and violet competed for our attention.

After a relaxing coffee stop, and browse in the charming museum at the back, my family and I continued our wander outside and through a back door where the factory has been making the famous bonbons for centuries, most recently by three generations of the Troubat family. The sweets are a traditional symbol of love, and as such are popular as favours at weddings, with the boxes depicting scenes of courting couples from days gone by.

Also within the abbey's walls is a small Carolingian crypt. Here, while the children ducked in and out of the various archways in the half-light, we admired the ornate sculptures and pillars, which date from the 13th century, when the abbey had a renowned sculpture workshop. Blinking back ➔

CLOCKWISE, FROM RIGHT: A quiet stroll in Flavigny; The Porte du Bourg, one of the village's impressive gates; A selection of aniseed imperials at the Anis de Flavigny shop; Easy to miss - the shopfront used in the film *Chocolat*

out into the daylight, we continued our stroll down Rue de l'Abbaye and into Rue des Anciennes Halles, enjoying the lack of traffic and admiring the wisteria-clad facades of the medieval houses, with ancient doorways, towers and turrets. Dipping down to our left via a steep lane, we weaved our way towards the impressive Porte du Val, the crenulated 16th-century gate, complete with two round towers.

Climbing back up the hill along Rue du Four, we found ourselves in the village's central square, where the church sits next to the *ferme-auberge* restaurant La Grange. After a hearty lunch in the canteen-style restaurant, we checked the map of the village on the wall, which revealed that we had walked straight past the famous shop frontage used in the film *Chocolat*. Going back around the corner, we discovered the dark and dusty shop-front, which would have been something of a sorry sight had we not delighted in our visits to the abbey producing the Anis de Flavigny and been warmed by the lunch of delicious local produce at La Grange. It was heartening to realise that the village's identity was so much more than a bit part in a Hollywood film, not to mention surprising that no enterprising soul had thought to open a *chocolaterie* there themselves.

A wander to the back of the church took us



along further pretty lanes and on to Rue Franklin where we spotted signs of a more commercial past in the form of faded painted advertisements for washing powder and chocolate. And a little further, in Place Abel Labourey, a wonderful fountain took centre stage in homage to the mayor who brought clean running water to the village in 1863.

Our visit came to an end at the equally impressive village gate called the Porte du Bourg, where, drenched in spring sunshine, we sat on the bench nearby and each had a taste of a blackcurrant aniseed imperial. 🍷



FLAVIGNY-SUR-OZERAIN AT A GLANCE

Stay the night at... There are a few *chambres d'hôtes* and *gîtes* within the village walls, and Maison Galimard (tel: (Fr) 6 73 94 12 88, www.alesia-tourisme.net/sophie-galimard) comes recommended. This small *chambre d'hôte* in the centre of the village has two guest rooms (from €90). Dogs are welcome and there is free Wi-Fi. Otherwise, book a stay at Le Petit Village holiday cottages in nearby Fulvy (tel: (Fr) 3 86 75 19 08, www.le-petit-village.com).

Stop for a coffee at... Anis de Flavigny (tel: (Fr) 3 80 96 20 88, www.anis-flavigny.com). At the back of the abbey shop, you'll find a little café-bookshop that serves

a great selection of coffees from around the world and provides a menu with notes on their flavours and origins. You can also choose a herbal tea. For those looking to imbibe the aniseed flavour in alcoholic form, try one of the aperitifs, which include different brands of *pastis* and *anisettes*.



Stop for lunch at... La Grange (pictured), tel: (Fr) 3 80 96 20 62, [www.ferme-](http://www.ferme-auberge-la-grange-flavigny21.fr)

auberge-la-grange-flavigny21.fr, a *ferme-auberge* serving delicious, home-made fare including gutsy quiches and *tartes*, copious salads, hearty stews and inviting fruit tarts. All the produce used is grown on local farms. Start your meal with the obligatory *kir*, made with home-made *crème de cassis* and *aligoté* wine. Despite the relaxed, canteen-style service, it is a good idea to book ahead as it is very popular.

Where to visit... You can watch part of the 15-day sugar-coating phase of the Anis de Flavigny factory process with ten-minute tours in groups of eight (Monday-Friday, 9am to 11am). For the village's other key sites, download a map from the village website (www.anis-flavigny.com), which includes Saint-Genest church, the shopfront used in the film *Chocolat* and the impressive village gates - the 15th-century Porte du Bourg and the 16th-century Porte du Val.

IN THE AREA

Flavigny-sur-Ozerain's origins hint at the theme of the area's other biggest attractions. It was nearby, in 52BC, that Julius Caesar took his army into battle with the Gallic tribes led by Vercingétorix. The dramatic story is told in vivid detail at the MuséoParc Alésia (pictured below, www.alesia.com), just outside the village of Venarey-les-Laumes. The interpretation centre is set in an impressive circular building, with a re-created battlefield and lookouts outside. Costumed actors, a special film and other exhibits allow visitors to gain a great understanding of the historic battle.

Up the hill in the village of Alise-Sainte-Reine, a huge statue of Vercingétorix (pictured) stands looking out over the landscape.

For those in search of more ancient history, the Vix treasure is on display at the Musée du Pays Châtillonnais (www.musee-vix.fr) in Châtillon-sur-Seine, which is around 55 kilometres north of Flavigny.

As the name of local towns suggests, the River Seine flows through this area en route to Paris from Source-Seine, which you can visit to see a rather modest statue to mark the start of France's most famous river.

Meanwhile, the other river in the area, the Yonne, offers a relaxing way to see this unspoiled area. Boating is popular, whether it be self-drive or



on board a *péniche-hôtel* barge (see www.burgundy-tourism.com for listings).

The region's capital is Dijon (www.destinationdijon.com), which makes for a good base or day out, especially for food and wine-lovers. As it is surrounded by some of France's finest vineyards, there are dozens of wine shops, wine bars and restaurants in which to try and buy a tipple or two. History enthusiasts will enjoy wandering through the Renaissance and medieval buildings. The Place de la Libération offers the city's most impressive architecture, with a dramatic semi-circle of grand buildings looking on to the Hôtel de Ville. A number of museums are there, including the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon (mba.dijon.fr). To get a good idea of the city's history, walk the 'owl trail', which covers the 22 best sites, and look for an owl statue or picture in each place.



TOURIST INFORMATION: The local area is known as the Pays Alésia, and its tourist office website has information on the surrounding attractions (tel: (Fr) 3 80 96 89 13, www.alesia-tourisme.net). For broader information on the area, contact the Burgundy tourist board (www.burgundy-tourism.com).

GETTING THERE: Carolyn travelled with Brittany Ferries from Portsmouth to Caen, sailing overnight in a cabin, which helped to break the journey, and drove the 4hr 30min to Flavigny. Fares start from £79 one way for a car plus two passengers (tel: 0330 159 7000, www.brittanyferries.co.uk). Carolyn returned via Calais with Eurotunnel. Return crossings cost from £23 per car with two passengers (tel: 0844 335 3535, www.eurotunnel.com); The nearest main railway stations are Montbard (25min) and Dijon (1hr). The journey from London via Paris takes 4hr 30min and 5hr respectively.



● Take a stroll through other French villages by visiting www.completefrance.com

OSCAR WILDE

A TALENT TO AMUSE

The Irish-born writer's turbulent life led him to spend his final years as an exile in France, explains **Sophie Gardner-Roberts**

A lot of ink has been spilt on the subject of Oscar Wilde, with false rumours circulating about his life, his work and even his death. The renowned writer and wit, best known for his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and his stage comedies *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, has more depth to him than his image as a dandy suggests.

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854 to literary parents. His father was a leading eye and ear surgeon, and also wrote books on Irish culture, while his mother was a poet and expert on Celtic folklore. Wilde was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and then at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he graduated with honours.

He quickly joined the Aesthetic movement, which looked for art in every form of life and advocated art for art's sake. Very soon, Wilde distinguished himself with his wit and flamboyance within London's literary circles. He spent 1882 in the United States and in Canada lecturing about the Aesthetic movement, displeasing many Americans with his velvet costumes and languid attitude. It is said that when Wilde arrived at customs in New York he claimed to have "nothing to declare but my genius".

Wilde returned to Great Britain and in 1884 married Constance Lloyd, daughter of an Irish barrister, with whom he had two children, Cyril and Vyvyan. He

worked for newspapers and magazines such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Woman's World*, but it was only in the final decade of his life that he published the works that made him famous.

He drew a lot of inspiration from French literary movements and authors. Wilde actually wrote a play in French entitled *Salomé*, which was translated into English in 1894 and performed in Paris in 1896. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) was inspired by Gothic literature, which Wilde coupled with elements from French decadent fiction, which strove to free art from the materialistic preoccupations of society. Another of his successes, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), followed the rules of the French 'well-made play' which calls for a complex plot, a build-up of suspense, a climactic scene where all the problems are resolved and a happy ending.

It was in the midst of these literary successes that Wilde's private life caught up with him. The aesthetic writer of secret sins and public disgrace was himself attacked for his relationships. His close friendship with Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas infuriated the latter's father, the

Marquess of Queensberry, who accused Wilde of homosexuality. Urged by his friend, Wilde sued the marquess for criminal libel but the case fell apart and, refusing to flee to France, Wilde was ordered to stand trial for gross indecency. In May 1895, he was sentenced to two years' forced labour.

On his release from prison in 1897, in poor health and financially ruined, Wilde crossed the Channel and went to Normandy. He spent the summer with friends in Dieppe and then in Berneval-le-Grand, where he wrote his final work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Wilde and 'Bosie' were reunited in Rouen and left for Naples, but they soon separated and the writer came to Paris in an attempt to revive his career. Shunned by most of his acquaintances and family (his wife and children had changed their surname), Wilde was visited by loyal friends such as Robert Ross, who later became his literary executor.

Wilde took a room in the Hôtel d'Alsace, in the sixth arrondissement of Paris. He died, not of syphilis as many thought, but of cerebral meningitis resulting from a recurring ear infection, on 30 November 1900, aged 46. 🐾



PHOTOGRAPHS: NIDAY PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; JACQUES LEBAR; GRANT ROONEY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; AMY MURRELL; DREAMTIME



THINGS TO SEE

1 Hôtel du Quai Voltaire, Paris

In 1883 Wilde stayed at the prestigious Hôtel Continental during one of several visits to Paris. However, afraid of running out of money, he booked into the more modest Hôtel du Quai Voltaire. The hotel is opposite the Musée du Louvre and just along from the Musée d'Orsay, and has spectacular views over the River Seine. Wilde's room, No. 14, is still available to guests. Tel: (Fr) 142 61 50 91 www.quaivoltaire.fr

2 Café des Tribunaux, Dieppe

The port of Dieppe was Wilde's first stop in France after his release from Reading jail and he went on to spend the summer of 1897 in Normandy. The writer often frequented the Café des Tribunaux in Place du Puits Salé, and irritated the locals because he and his friends would party loudly until the early hours. The café, which was also popular with the Impressionists, serves traditional bistro dishes. Tel: (Fr) 2 32 14 44 65 www.cafedestribunaux.fr

3 L'Hôtel, Paris

The Hôtel d'Alsace in Saint-Germain-des Près, where Wilde spent his final days, has shortened its name and been transformed by interior designer Jacques Garcia into a five-star hotel. Guests can stay in the writer's room, renamed the Oscar Wilde Suite, and join a tour tracing his footsteps in the capital. The tour, led by historian Dominique Vibrac, ends at the hotel, either with lunch in the Michelin-star restaurant or with afternoon tea (€85/€70). Tel: (Fr) 144 41 99 00 www.l-hotel.com

4 Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris

Wilde was originally buried in Bagneux cemetery, south of Paris. Nine years after his death, his former lover, Robert Ross, arranged for his remains to be moved to Père Lachaise, final resting place of many artistic and literary figures. The tomb, the work of sculptor Jacob Epstein, depicts a 'flying demon angel'. A tradition developed where visitors kissed the tomb after applying lipstick, leaving lip prints on the stone, so a glass barrier was put up in 2011. www.en.parisinfo.com



BON APPÉTIT

*The best of French gastronomy
at home and away*

FLAVOURS OF PROVENCE

Laurent Halasz is founder of the American restaurant chain Fig & Olive, but he grew up in the town of Mougins on the French Riviera, where his mother Francine's cooking instilled in him a love for the simple, healthy flavours of Provençal cuisine.

Fresh, seasonal and bursting with flavour – these are the words that sum up the food that appeared on his mother's plate, and it is a philosophy that Laurent has followed in a new book, *Fig & Olive: The Cuisine of the French Riviera*.

Accompanied by full-page photographs, more than 60 recipes cover everything from aperitifs to desserts and include Riviera favourites such as *salade niçoise* and *bouillabaisse*. Butter, cream and heavy sauces are avoided in favour of olive oil and other market produce. On the next two pages we give four mouth-watering examples for you to try.



Recipes taken from *Fig & Olive: The Cuisine of the French Riviera*, by Laurent and Francine Halasz, published by Assouline (www.assouline.com), priced £34.99.

RECIPE PHOTOGRAPHS: HARALD GOTTSCHALK



CARAMELISED COURGETTES

SERVES
4

- 680g/1½lb courgettes
- *Fleur de sel*
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 15g/¼ cup *herbes de Provence*
- 120g/½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 2 Italian plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

1. Preheat the grill.
2. Slice the courgette lengthwise into 10cm by 1.2cm/4in by ½in pieces and place on a lightly oiled, rimmed baking sheet.
3. Sprinkle with *fleur de sel*, pepper, *herbes de Provence* and parmesan.
4. Spread the diced tomato on the top and drizzle with olive oil.
5. Grill the courgettes for five minutes.
6. Serve immediately.

ROASTED CHICKEN WITH RATATOUILLE, CONFIT POTATOES AND BASIL AÏOLI

SERVES
4

For the chicken

- 4 cloves garlic
- Leaves from ten sprigs of rosemary
- Leaves from half a bunch of parsley
- 160ml/½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1.13kg-1.36kg/2½lb-3lb chicken (preferably organic)
- 10 sprigs of thyme
- Juice of two lemons
- 2tsp salt
- 1tsp Ayala spice (a blend of rosemary, salt, pepper and garlic)
- 1tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 500g/1lb 2oz/2 cups ratatouille
- Basil leaves, to garnish

For the confit potatoes

- 360ml/2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 10 sprigs of thyme
- 1 sprig of rosemary
- 454g/1lb fingerling potatoes
- 2tsp salt

For the basil aïoli

- 28g/1oz basil, finely chopped
- ½ clove garlic, finely chopped
- 120g/½ cup mayonnaise
- 1tsp fresh lemon juice

To make the chicken

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F.
2. Place the garlic, half the rosemary, the parsley and the olive oil in a blender and blend until smooth.
3. Stuff the chicken with the remaining rosemary and the thyme.
4. Pour the marinade and the lemon juice inside and outside the bird.
5. Season with salt, Ayala spice and black pepper (inside and out).
6. Rub the marinade into the chicken.
7. Place the chicken, breast-side up, on a roasting pan with a rack and roast for 75 minutes, rotating halfway through.
8. Cook until the thigh temperature reaches 75°C/165°F.
9. Leave it to rest for 15-20 minutes.

To cook the confit potatoes

1. Place the olive oil, bay leaves, garlic, thyme, rosemary, potatoes and salt in a medium-sized pot on medium-low heat.



2. Cook until the potatoes are knife-tender, about 15-20 minutes.

To make the basil aïoli

1. Combine all the ingredients and keep in a refrigerator.

To serve

1. Cut the chicken in half down the middle with kitchen shears, and cut the breast from the thigh and leg.
2. Divide the potatoes and ratatouille among the plates, followed by a chicken thigh with a leg and the breast with a wing.
3. Garnish with basil leaves and serve with the basil aïoli. ➡



FILET MIGNON

For the *filet*

- 6tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, grated
- Leaves from 2 sprigs of rosemary, chopped
- 900g/2lb *filet mignon*, cut into 4 pieces
- 2tsp salt
- 2tsp Pierre Poivre (or black pepper)
- **For the vegetables**
- 113g/4oz *haricots verts*
- 113g/4oz yellow wax beans
- 4tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 shallot, sliced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 500g/18oz/2 cups chive-mashed potatoes
- 10 chives, cut into 1in pieces, to garnish
- Leaves from half a bunch of parsley, to garnish

SERVES
4

To marinate the *filet*

1. Combine the olive oil, garlic and rosemary.
2. Set aside half and use the rest to marinate the *filet mignon*. For the best flavour, leave overnight.

To grill the *filet*

1. Heat the grill to high.
2. Remove the steaks from the marinade and season them with salt and Pierre Poivre.
3. Grill, flipping every two minutes, for eight to 12 minutes, or until an internal temperature of at least 60°C/135°F is reached for medium rare.
4. Allow to rest for at least five minutes before serving.

To make the vegetables

1. Boil a large pan of salted water and cook the *haricots verts* and wax beans for two minutes. Remove to an ice bath for two minutes and drain well.
2. Set a large sauté pan over high heat. Add the olive oil and sliced shallot, and season with salt and pepper.
3. Add the wax beans and *haricots verts* and sauté until the shallots are caramelised and the beans are heated through.

To serve

1. Place hot mashed potatoes on each plate with the beans next to them and place a steak on top.
2. Spoon the reserved marinade on the steaks and top with chives and parsley.

APPLE TARTS

SERVES
4

- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and cored
- Non-stick cooking tray
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry
- 2tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 3tbsp granulated sugar
- 2tbsp apricot jam
- 1tsp water
- 1tsp confectioners'/icing sugar
- Vanilla ice cream, for serving (optional)

1. Preheat the oven to 210°C/415°F.
2. Cut the apples in half top to bottom and lay the flat edges down on a cutting board. Slice into very thin half-rounds.
3. Spray a rimmed baking sheet with non-stick cooking spray.


4. Cut the puff pastry into four 10cm by 15 cm/4in by 6in rectangles (or four 11.5cm/4½in rounds) and place on the pan, being sure to leave 2.5cm/1in between each piece of pastry.

5. Use a fork to gently prick each pastry five times.

6. Arrange the apple slices on top (overlapping to prevent gaps), leaving a 0.6cm/¼in border around each tart. There should be approximately 18 apple slices on each.

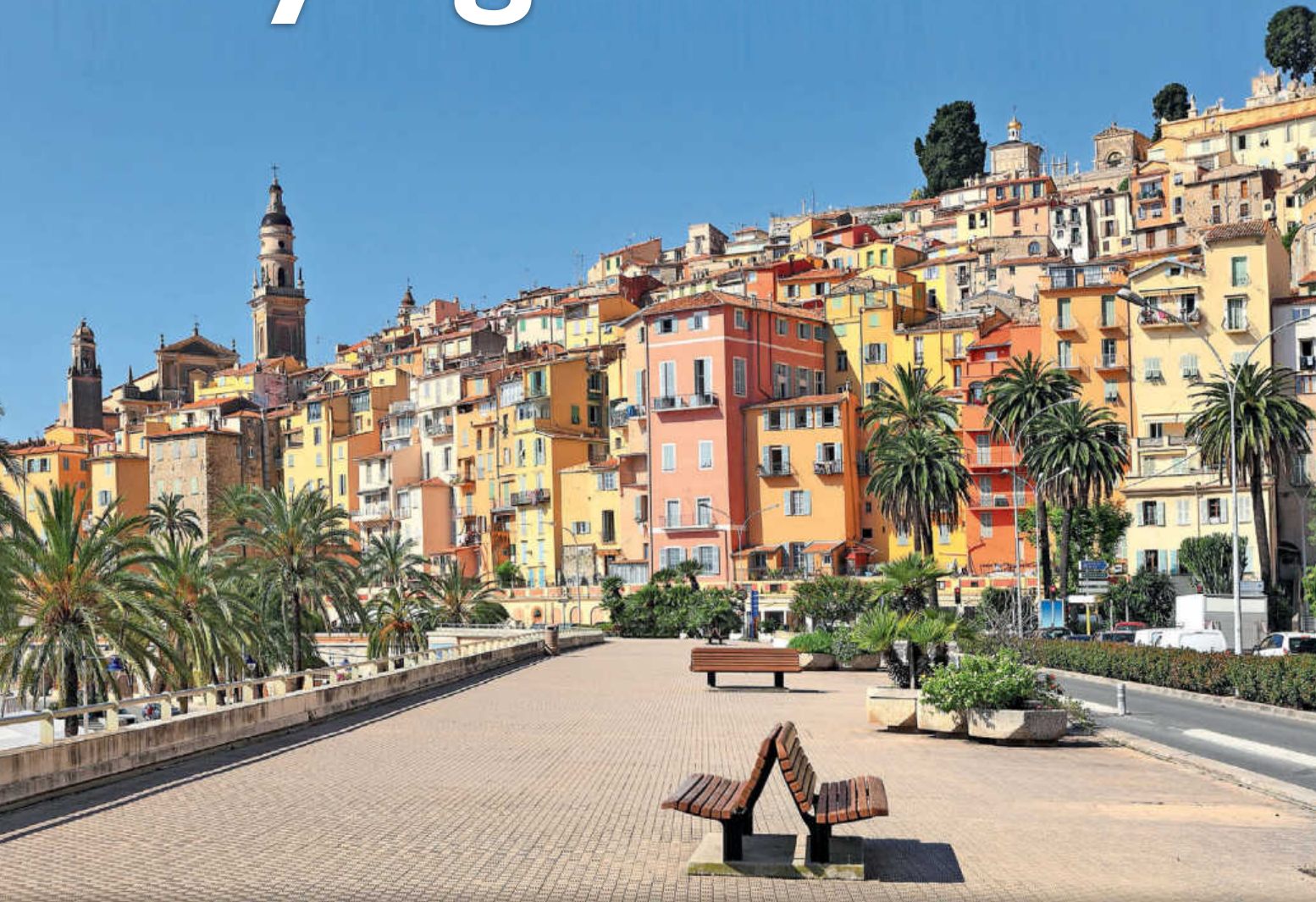
7. Brush lightly with melted butter and sprinkle with sugar.

8. Bake for 12-15 minutes or until golden brown, rotating pan halfway through cooking. Allow the tarts to cool completely.

9. Combine the apricot jam and water to make the glaze, and then brush each tart with a thin layer before sprinkling over the sugar. 



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ROQUEFORT, SMOKED SALMON AND ASPARAGUS QUICHE

Aveyron dairy farmer Alice Ricard produces ewe's milk used to make Roquefort cheese (see feature on page 48). She and her family use the cheese in dishes such as this:

INGREDIENTS

- One portion shortcrust pastry
- 150g smoked salmon (or smoked trout)
- 400g asparagus, fresh or tinned
- 4 eggs
- 200ml crème fraîche
- Pinch of pepper
- 150g Roquefort

1. Cook the asparagus.
2. Roll out the pastry and line a buttered flan dish.
3. Spread out the smoked salmon and top with the asparagus.
4. Beat the eggs and crème fraîche well and add the pepper.
5. Crumble the Roquefort (not too finely) into the mixture and pour over the asparagus and salmon.
6. Bake in a preheated oven at 200°C for 35 minutes.
7. Serve warm or cold.

Here's another popular recipe: BACON AND ROQUEFORT OPEN SANDWICHES

Ingredients

- 4 thick-cut slices of *pain de campagne* or other wholemeal bread
- 8 rashers lean or streaky dry-cured bacon, rinds removed
- 150g Roquefort
- 2tbsp double cream or crème fraîche
- 1tbsp chopped chives
- Pinch of pepper

1. Lightly grill, toast or fry the bread.
2. Fry the bacon until crisp.
3. Mash the Roquefort with the cream, chives and pepper.
4. Lay rashers on the bread, spread with the Roquefort mixture and grill until it sizzles.

TIME FOR A CUPPA

Visit the merchants giving a French twist to Britain's favourite brew

For a long time, many French people regarded tea as hot water in a cup and left it to the 'tea drinkers from across the Channel' while they stuck to black coffee. However, tea is no longer dismissed as a bland, warm beverage, and is becoming fashionable.

Its supposed health benefits and calming properties seem to have seduced consumers in France, where two out of three people now indulge. Teas even have their *grands crus*, dedicated bars and luxury accessories.

Here are four tea merchants that give a French twist to the British cuppa.

Dammann Frères

The oldest tea brand in France began in 1692 when Louis XIV granted Sieur (Lord) Damame the exclusive rights to sell tea in the country. The family-run company grew exponentially, introducing pioneering products over the years such as Cristal tea sachets. It now has

four shops in Paris (including one in the plush Place des Vosges, tel: (Fr) 1 44 54 04 88) and others in Strasbourg and Nîmes, as well as a presence in 62 countries.

www.dammann.fr

Mariage Frères

Founded in 1854, Mariage Frères has developed a range of luxurious *grands crus* and rare loose-leaf varieties, presented in distinctive black tins. It has a number of shops and *salons du thé* (pictured below) in Paris and runs a Tea Club at two of them where you can enjoy tutored tastings.

(Rive Gauche, tel: (Fr) 1 40 51 82 50, Étoile, tel: (Fr) 1 43 47 18 54). www.mariagefreres.com



Le Palais des Thés

In 1986, about 50 tea enthusiasts decided to create their own company, sourcing directly from producers and travelling the world looking for the best leaves. Le Palais des Thés (pictured above) now has 27 shops across France and prides itself on its eco-friendly policies.

Tel: (Fr) 1 43 56 90 90 www.palaisdesthes.com



Betjeman & Barton

Established in 1919, this once all-male institution is now run by five women who have reinvented the brand and created astonishing flavours for its shops in Paris and the provinces. In 2013, they opened the first tea bar in the capital (pictured above), in the 11th arrondissement, where 150 teas can be enjoyed.

Tel: (Fr) 1 48 05 07 36 www.betjemanandbarton.com

RESTAURANT REVIEW

LA PETITE BRETAGNE HAMMERSMITH

Brittany is famed for its delicious *crêpes*, but you don't need to hop across the Channel to get your quick fix of these sweet and savoury treats. If you live in London or are visiting the capital, La Petite Bretagne is a cosy *crêperie* offering an authentic taste of Breton cooking.

This stylish little place, right opposite Hammersmith Tube station, has lots of charm; think long wooden tables screen-printed with a red gingham pattern, minimalist lampshades, a neutral grey colour scheme and neat displays of salted caramel jars.

My two friends and I went for lunch and were taken to a delightful little table at the back, where we had a side view of the chefs at work in the open-plan kitchen – all the *crêpes* are hand-made to order here. There is a takeaway service, but sitting down and enjoying your Breton treat at leisure is definitely part of the experience.

After perusing the generous selection of savoury and sweet choices on the menu, I finally opted for a spinach, egg and cheese *crêpe* and a small glass of *cider brut*, while my friends both chose the indulgent *tartiflette* of reblochon cheese, bacon, cream, potato and onion. The *crêpes* were delicious and we had just enough room for dessert.

One of my companions opted for a chocolate and salted butter caramel *crêpe*, while the other chose one filled with a layer of chestnut cream. I had the decadent raspberry madness, which was a blissful union of fresh berries, coulis



and melted white chocolate. Excellent service from the friendly staff made our experience all the more enjoyable.

With such an authentic range of *crêpes* on offer, it is little wonder that many people are calling this west London hideaway one of the best places in the capital for these Breton specialities.

All the savoury *crêpes* are made with gluten-free buckwheat flour. The sweet *crêpes* use plain flour, but if you prefer buckwheat, let staff know when you order.

The *crêperie* also serves home-made *kouign amann*, a Breton cake made from folded-in layers of butter and sugar, and stocks other regional products such as salted caramel, cider and La Belle-Iloise canned fish products to take home.

Peter Stewart

Savoury *crêpes* from £6.90 (£4.90 to take away), sweet from £3.40 (£2.50 to take away).

Tel: 0208 127 5530, www.lapetitebretagne.co.uk

WINES OF THE MONTH BY SALLY EASTON, MASTER OF WINE

SNAP IT UP

La Marinière 2014, Muscadet, Loire Valley

One day the Muscadet renaissance will surely be upon us. In the meantime there are some really good 'everyday' bottles around, such as this light-bodied, fresh example. It has that faintly saline tang typical of Muscadet, amid citrus and slightly peachy notes. The modest alcohol level (12 per cent) will also suit a growing number of us wine drinkers.

Drink with: *Fruits de mer*, of course, or as an aperitif with nutty nibbles.

Waitrose, £5.99

Tel: 0800 188 881

www.waitrosecellar.com



WEEKEND TREAT

Les Chais Réunis 2014 Châteauneuf-du-Pape

Châteauneuf-du-Pape is such a famous name that it's easy to be disappointed, but not with this newcomer from M&S. It is well balanced with a fine, smooth tannin texture, full body and plentiful red fruits from its grenache and syrah blend. The typical 14 per cent alcohol is well integrated into this classically big wine, with fruit cake notes, plums, cherries, raisins and sweet spices.

Drink with: Steak and chips or a concentrated ratatouille.

Marks and Spencer, £17

Tel: 0333 014 8000

www.marksandspencer.com



TIME TO CELEBRATE

Château Paveil de Luze 2012 Margaux, Bordeaux

This stalwart *Cru Bourgeois* claret is made in an approachable style for ready drinking, not designed for long ageing. It's a classic Bordeaux left-bank blend of 70 per cent cabernet sauvignon and 30 per cent merlot. The tannins, which could be challenging in the 2012 vintage, are well managed here – chalky, with a fine-grained grip to provide structure. The balance is crisp, with dark berry fruits, cassis and blackberries.

Drink with: Roast lamb.

Goedhuis & Co, £21.50

Tel: 0207 793 7900

www.goedhuis.com





Make the perfect... Lapin à la moutarde

Overcome any scruples about eating rabbit, says **Rosa Jackson**, and try this succulent dish with its creamy mustard sauce

I have always been an omnivore by nature, happily tucking into anything from raw anchovies to lamb's liver. Yet, until I set foot in the Cordon Bleu cookery school a couple of decades ago, there was one commonly consumed meat I thought I would never try – rabbit. Perhaps it was because of the stuffed animal that followed me everywhere during my childhood, or the real (though slightly less cuddly) one that I later kept as a pet. Whatever my logic, on my first day at cooking school I knew that I would rather stab a lobster between the eyes than eat the furry central character of *Watership Down*.

Being a *gourmande*, I eventually relented. When the day came to make *lapin à la moutarde*, the smell of the simmering white wine, crème fraîche and Dijon mustard persuaded me to try just a bite, purely to fulfil my duty as a food explorer. One bite became two, then three, and soon rabbit with mustard sauce became not just something I would eat, but my favourite Cordon Bleu dish.

Rabbit has an unfair reputation for being a dry meat that tastes a bit like chicken. When roasted with mustard to seal in its moisture or braised with wine or tomato, its white meat grows surprisingly tender and juicy, with a delicate flavour of its own. If you don't see it often in restaurants, it's partly because, for the French, it was traditionally associated with family meals, much like roast chicken or *poule au pot* (stewed hen). These days, rabbit does not seem as prevalent at butchers' shops as it was when I first came to France, but it still has its place, usually next to the free-range chickens and complete with its head and claws.

Though a whole, skinned rabbit can

seem a little daunting to cook, the butcher will cut it into convenient pieces for you, discarding the head unless you wish to add it to the stew for flavour (remember to remove it before serving the dish). Connoisseurs will choose a rabbit according to the meatiness of the saddle, called the *râble* in French, the size and smoothness of its liver, and its kidneys, which should be covered in white fat. The organ meats are delicacies that can be fried and added to your dish at the last moment, or served separately. Some people also treasure the tongue, but that's going a little far even for me. If the idea of facing a whole rabbit makes you squeamish, French supermarkets also sell boneless rabbit fillets, which can be quickly pan-fried.

Lapin à la moutarde originated in Burgundy, which makes sense, as this is the home of Dijon mustard. The Cordon Bleu version of this recipe departs from others in two ways: it calls for grainy rather than smooth mustard because of its milder, fruitier flavour, and the rabbit is oven-roasted rather than pan-fried.

Unlike many classic French recipes, it requires little effort apart from a quick finishing off of the sauce at the end; this grandmotherly French dish needs no cheffy touches. You can serve it with rice or potatoes, but at the Cordon Bleu we had it with fresh pasta, a perfect match for the creamy mustard sauce. 🍷



Food critic and cookbook author Rosa Jackson lives in Nice, where she runs the cookery school Les Petits Farcis and writes about food for publications worldwide.

LAPIN À LA MOUTARDE

Though this recipe, adapted from the Cordon Bleu, calls for grainy mustard, substitute the smooth Dijon variety if it is easier to find or you prefer its stronger flavour. This is not the place, however, to use English mustard.

- 1.5kg/3 lb rabbit, cut into pieces by your butcher
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Grainy mustard for coating the rabbit
- 2 large shallots, finely chopped
- 125ml/½ cup white wine
- 150ml/⅓ cup crème fraîche
- Butter, for the roasting tin

SERVES
6

1. Preheat the oven to 225°C/ 450°F/ gas mark 8. Brush a roasting tin with the softened butter.
2. Season the rabbit pieces with salt and pepper, then use a pastry brush to coat them generously on both sides with mustard. Place the rabbit in the tin and roast for 35 minutes. Add the chopped shallots to the tin, stir to combine with the juices and roast for another five minutes.
3. Remove the dish from the oven. Add the white wine and roast for another ten minutes. Add the cream, shake the pan to combine the ingredients, and return to the oven for five minutes. Taste the sauce and adjust the seasoning.
4. Serve the rabbit very hot, with fresh pasta, rice or small potatoes that have been steamed or boiled.

1 LE PARK 45

With an uninterrupted view of the seafront, Le Park 45's light, airy dining room is a Mediterranean delight. The restaurant is part of the Grand Hôtel and spills out on to lawns and a terrace, decorated in 1960s 'Riviera' style.

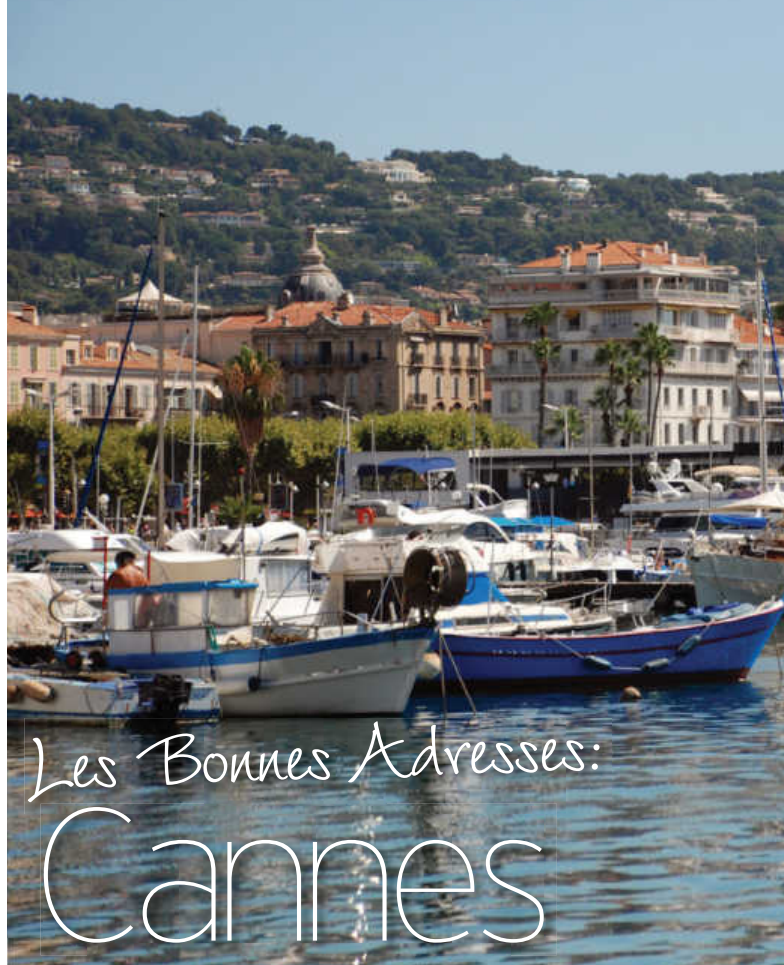
The purple and light green fittings give a fresh feel and a nod to what is still a rarity among French Michelin-starred restaurants: a full vegetarian menu as part of the exquisite service. Chef Sébastien Broda (*pictured below*) developed the idea at the end of last year and claims many diners now opt for the vegetable bouillabaisse, roast endive with parmesan and truffles, or a celery assortment over the more classic red mullet with octopus pastry or duckling *à la royale*. Broda has created a joyous, inventive cuisine and diners are rewarded with plenty of creative, fancy *amuse-bouches* throughout the meal.

All produce comes from environmentally respectful suppliers, and the service is immaculate, discreet and warm with bronze-coloured cutlery and starched white napkins. The inventive desserts include a Grand Marnier soufflé with custard and sorbet, or a vanilla disc on hazelnut sponge, with pear, salted butter caramel and peanut crumble. Four-course *Le Veggie* menu €55, six-course *L'Inspiration* menu €140, lunch menus from €29. Open daily for lunch and dinner (closed for lunch, July and August).

45 Boulevard de la Croisette, 06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 38 15 45

www.grand-hotel-cannes.com



Les Bonnes Adresses: Cannes

Find the best places to eat in this glamorous resort, with the help of Riviera resident **Jon Bryant**

2 AUX BONS ENFANTS

Many of the recipes at the most 'authentic' restaurant in Cannes have been served since Aux Bons Enfants opened in 1935, "although they have changed over time," says third-generation owner and head chef Luc Giorsetti (*pictured right*).

Fresh vegetables come from the nearby Forville market where Luc used to play as a boy. He grew up in the restaurant, so although he went on to study business, life only felt complete when he was back working here.

Today, the restaurant is known for its tasty, rustic dishes and bistro-style ambience. Mains include squid *daube* (stew), terrine of roast artichoke with cheese and pancetta, or black pudding with mustardy apple sauce. The restaurant has no phone





On the waterfront at Cannes

and only accepts cash, so guests need to drop in the day before or just turn up early and hope.

Luc's grandfather, who opened the original restaurant, got a job as a *garçon de café* on a cruise liner but went out drinking with his friends to celebrate, got drunk and woke up too late the next morning to catch his ride. The name of the ship? *Titanic*; so, but for a twist of fate, Aux Bons Enfants may never have existed. Closed Sundays all year and on Mondays outside school holidays and conventions, three-course meal €37.

80 Rue Meynadier, 06400 Cannes

www.aux-bons-enfants.com/accueil-uk

3 L'ÉPONYME

L'Éponyme opened just a year ago and is already 'the' place to go for a cool, lively, romantic meal in Cannes. It has a stylish, modern, bohemian atmosphere with rough stone walls covered in art (it also operates as a gallery) with a small *apéro* lounge upstairs and delicately lit niches full of curios and cookery books. It is owned and managed by Fanny, her partner Franck and Fanny's brother, Bertrand, who is responsible for the cooking.

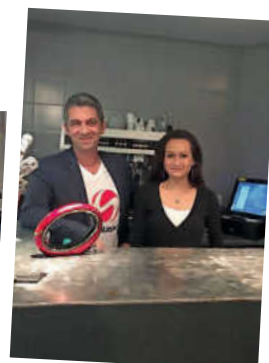
The lunchtime crowd comes from the shops and businesses of the local *quartier*, while in the evening it is full of couples, enjoying the homely, slightly intellectual yet tender feel. There are only 30 covers and each table has a special recess designed to hold phones, wine bottles and handbags. Almost all the wine served is organic, and with the art, photos, giant vases of flowers, glinting magnums, gentle lighting and friendly atmosphere, it is a great place to escape the resort's bustling Croisette seafront.

Specialities include stir-fried sea bream with lemon-flavoured oil and a carrot and cumin mash, or Pata Negra ham with mustard sauce and Ratte potatoes followed by pineapple carpaccio with lemon sorbet. Open Tuesday to Saturday, three-course menu €29, *formule de midi* with drink and coffee €15.

4 Rue de Bône, 06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 99 48 71

www.leponyme-cannes.com



Eating in

Explore the market and shops of Cannes to find the best Mediterranean produce

MARKET

Marché Forville

5-11 Rue du Marché Forville
06400 Cannes

Fresh produce from fruit and vegetables to fish fill the covered market every morning except Monday, when it is full of antiques.

CHEESE

Fromagerie Ceneri

22 Rue Meynadier
06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 39 63 68

www.fromagerie-ceneri.com

Ceneri sells 300 cheeses from all over Europe but its speciality is a brie with truffles that sells for €60 a kilogram. The wood-panelled shop has been a fixture in Cannes since 1968 and sells everything from local goat's cheese to paprika-wrapped Boulette.

FISH

Astoux et Brun

3 Rue Louis Blanc
06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 39 21 87

www.laboutiqueastouxetbrun.com

A few strides from the sea, this fishmonger is an object of beauty with pea-green tiles, columns of bubbles and ceramic-topped tables full of prawns, crabs, sea bass and trays of oysters.

MEAT

Boucherie Olivari

38 Rue Meynadier
06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 39 09 93

www.boucherie-olivari.com

Just down from the cheese shop, this butcher opened in 1960 and has big pavement cabinets full of Bresse chickens, pigs' trotters and guinea fowl. There is even a film-festival red-velvet rope to keep customers in line.

PÂTISSERIE

Jean-Luc Pelé

36 Rue Meynadier
06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 4 93 38 06 10

www.jeanlucpele.com

The first of four Pelé pastry boutiques in Cannes is packed with brightly coloured *macarons*, filled with vanilla, green tea and pistachio cream.

ICE-CREAM

Glacier Niva

75 Rue Félix Faure
06400 Cannes

Tel: (Fr) 9 51 13 87 34

Try the creamy ricotta with caramelised figs at this new addition to the Cannes seafront.



Alsace adventure

As vineyards burst into life after winter, **Dominic Rippon** visits the Haut-Rhin département to meet a famous winemaking family

Alsace's wine capital, Colmar, is famed for its dazzling Christmas markets, where thousands gather to drink *vin chaud* and shop for local delicacies among the beautifully preserved half-timbered houses. Building upon the success of its *marchés de Noël*, Colmar launched its Easter markets in 2011, which have grown to include an array of arts and crafts exhibitions, and musical entertainment.

Spring also marks the beginning of the vine-growing season, when the vineyards of the Haut-Rhin *département* regain their verdant hue and new shoots produce embryonic flowers. Alsace's most famous wine estates are only a few kilometres from Colmar; ancient winemaking families such as the Hugels of Riquewihr and the Fallers of Domaine Weinbach in Kaysersberg make some of the region's most highly prized bottles. Riquewihr is the Haut-Rhin's emblematic *Plus Beau Village*, with its cobbled thoroughfare, vivid picture-book houses and fortified walls that have changed little since medieval times.

A stone's throw from Riquewihr is the slightly larger town of Ribeauvillé: a colourful collection of *hôtels particuliers* and Gothic churches that nevertheless feels more like a working town than its bijou neighbour. It is overlooked by the sheer slopes of three *Grand Cru* vineyards: Geisberg, Osterberg and Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé. These in turn nestle beneath the ruins of three medieval castles – Saint-



Dominic Rippon has many years' experience in the wine trade, both in the UK and France, and now runs the wine merchant business Strictly Wine.

Ulrich, Ribeaupierre and Girsberg – which rise eerily from the forest above the town.

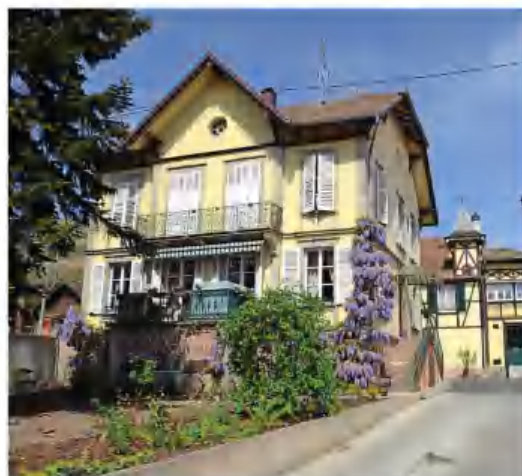
Ribeauvillé is also home to the extraordinary Trimbach wine estate, which supplies almost all of France's three-Michelin-star restaurants; most of the rest finds its way overseas. The Trimbachs began making wine in Riquewihr in the early 17th century, moving to Ribeauvillé after World War I to occupy a grand, turreted mansion house at the foot of the *Grand Cru* Geisberg vineyard.

I met Anne Trimbach, the 13th generation of the family, for a tour of the cellars. Although the Trimbachs arrived in Ribeauvillé a mere century ago, their subterranean 'wine library', as Anne refers to it, includes many wines that were bottled in the 19th century – labelled in either French or German, depending on Alsace's nationality at the time.

In a region where levels of sweetness in wine can be difficult to determine until you've popped the corks, Maison Trimbach makes consistently dry wines. Even when there is a little sugar, the impression is of elegance, minerality and, in youth, austerity; leading many in this region of ancient religious rivalries to caricature them as 'Protestant', as opposed to the richer, more flamboyant 'Catholic' style of wine. Yet for Anne, like her father Pierre, the wines are defined by their *terroir* rather than any religious affiliation.


The Trimbachs' militant belief in their *terroirs* has, until recently, persuaded them to opt out of





LEFT: Half-timbered houses in the *Plus Beau Village* of Ribeauvillé; **TOP:** Vigneronne Anne Trimbach; **ABOVE:** The mansion of Maison Trimbach in Ribeauvillé

the Alsace *Grand Cru* vineyard classification that was developed in the 1970s. Although the classification was conceived to highlight the region's best *terroirs*, the family believed that the vineyard boundaries were drawn too liberally, so they chose instead to trade on their estate's own reputation. Jancis Robinson MW has called Trimbach's Clos Sainte-Hune, from a 1.67-hectare parcel of vines within the Rosacker *Grand Cru* vineyard, "the finest Riesling in Alsace – some would say the world." Indeed the family has always believed its *clos* to be so superior to the rest of the *Grand Cru* that it chose not to use the latter's name on the label.

Last year, however, Maison Trimbach caused a stir by releasing its first wine labelled Alsace *Grand Cru*. It comes from the Geisberg vineyard, made from vines that the family leases from its neighbours – the nuns at the Couvent de Ribeauvillé. Traditionally, the juice was blended with *Grand Cru* Osterberg to make Riesling 'Cuvée Frédéric Émile', the estate's signature blend. But Pierre Trimbach decided to bottle the 2009 vintage separately, as *Grand Cru* Geisberg; a sign perhaps of a new confidence in the Alsace *Grand Cru* appellation, and a surprise for any pundit who dares to call it "a very Protestant wine". 

THE WINEMAKER RECOMMENDS

Vigneronne Anne Trimbach gives her personal advice on where to stay and dine in the area.

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel de la Tour
1 Rue de la Mairie
68150 Ribeauvillé
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 72 73
www.hotel-la-tour.com
Hotel in the centre of Ribeauvillé with 31 rooms and a wellness centre for guests. Doubles from €85.

Brendel Espace Suites

48 Rue du Général de Gaulle
68340 Riquewihr
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 86 54 55
www.jlbrendel.com
Seven modern, luxury suites attached to the D'Brendelstüb restaurant. Suites from €169.

WHERE TO EAT

Wistub du Sommelier
51 Grand'Rue
68750 Bergheim
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 69 99
www.wistub-du-sommelier.com
Alsatian restaurant offering local specialities and a fabulous wine list. Menus from €18.

Restaurant Le Maximilien
19 Route d'Ostheim
68340 Zellenberg
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 47 99 69
www.le-maximilien.com
A Michelin-starred symbol of fine dining in Alsace. Menus from €35.

WHERE TO VISIT

Château de Haut-Koenigsbourg
67600 Orschwiller
Tel: (Fr) 3 69 33 25 00
www.haut-koenigsbourg.fr
Hilltop fortress with beautiful views of the Vosges mountains. Open all year, admission €9.

Musée Unterlinden
Place Unterlinden
68000 Colmar
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 20 15 50
www.musee-unterslinden.com
Newly enlarged museum containing a treasure trove of archaeology and fine art from the Middle Ages to modern times. Open all year, admission €13.



GETTING THERE: Colmar is a 6hr drive from the northern ferry ports;

The train journey from London to Colmar via Paris takes 6hr 20min;

The nearest airports are Strasbourg-Entzheim (50min) and Basel-Mulhouse (40min); **TOURIST INFORMATION:** Visit Alsace, www.tourisme-alsace.com;

ALSACE WINES: Tel: (Fr) 3 89 20 16 20, www.vinsalsace.com

TOURING THE VINEYARDS

Maison Trimbach
15 Route de Bergheim
68150 Ribeauvillé
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 60 30
www.trimbach.fr
Choice wine: Riesling Clos Sainte-Hune 2008.
Taste: Dry but elegant; approachable but age-worthy; with unparalleled fruit concentration and complexity of flavour.
Drink with: Lobster or seafood risotto.
Price at the estate: €139.

Also visit:
Louis Sipp
5 Grand'Rue
68150 Ribeauvillé
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 60 01
www.sipp.com
Choice wine: Riesling Grand Cru Kirchberg de Ribeauvillé.
Taste: Powerful citrus and exotic aromas with a delicately dry palate.

André Kientzler
50 Route de Bergheim
68150 Ribeauvillé
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 67 10
www.vinskientzler.com

Choice wine: Riesling Grand Cru Geisberg.
Taste: Ripe fruits on the nose with freshness and generosity on the palate.

Cave de Ribeauvillé
2 Route de Colmar
68150 Ribeauvillé
Tel: (Fr) 3 89 73 20 35
<http://alsace.vins-ribeauville.com>
Choice wine: Riesling Grand Cru Osterberg.
Taste: Citrus and mineral notes, with bracing acidity and impressive length.

LA CULTURE

Your essential guide to French culture and language

HAT-TRICK HERO

French playwright **FLORIAN ZELLER**, who has enjoyed three London stage hits in quick succession, tells **Caroline Bishop** about creating humour out of tragedy

It's rare for a contemporary French playwright to find success in Britain. Not since Yasmina Reza triumphed in the West End with plays including *Art* and *God of Carnage* has a playwright from France been so championed across the Channel. Until now.

A decade after *The Independent* newspaper described novelist and playwright Florian Zeller as one of the "hottest literary talents in France", the now 36-year-old is the toast of London after having not one but three of his plays staged in the world's theatre capital this year.

It's all thanks to Theatre Royal Bath, whose producer had seen Zeller's Molière Award-winning 2012 play *Le Père* (*The Father*) in Paris and decided to stage it back home. Translated by *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* playwright and screenwriter Christopher Hampton – who also translated Reza's plays into English – and starring veteran actor Kenneth Cranham, this searing drama about an elderly man with dementia opened to five-star reviews in Bath in 2014 before transferring to London. After its second West End run, it is embarking on a UK tour this spring.

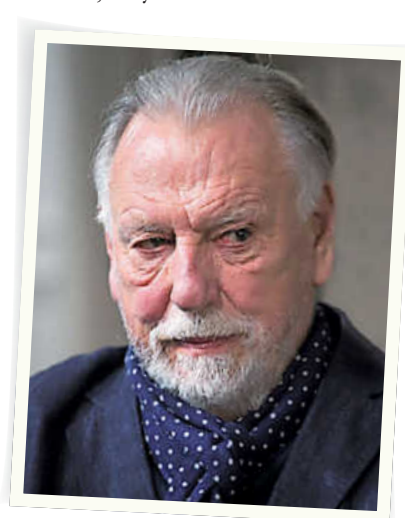
Its success blazed a trail for Zeller's companion piece *The Mother* (*La Mère*), about a woman driven to distraction by empty-nest syndrome, which followed the same route from Bath in 2015 to the capital this January. A third play, *The Truth* (*La Vérité*), a biting comedy

about infidelity, opened at the Menier Chocolate Factory in south London at the beginning of March.

"It completely delights me," Zeller tells me from his home in Paris, where he lives with his wife, actress Marine Delterme, and their seven-year-old son, Roman. "It's wonderful for me that my shows have multiple lives."

Part Pinteresque thriller, part comedy, but wholly tragic, *The Father* follows dementia sufferer André as he tries to make sense of his increasingly confusing life. Zeller wrote it as a vehicle for the now 90-year-old French actor Robert Hirsch, who led him to the topic.

"I wrote it without really knowing what I was writing. It was only at the end that I realised it was about the subject of dementia," says Zeller.



The play's coup de théâtre is Zeller's reality-bending structure. Scenes are repeated in a slightly different way, furniture in André's flat starts disappearing, his daughter Anne keeps contradicting herself and the nurse she hires to care for him is never the same woman. The technique draws the audience into André's head, so we see events from his perspective: as disorientating, frustrating and slightly sinister.

"What interests me is to use very simple literary material and let the complexity come from the construction," says Zeller. "It's a strategy to tell the story I want to tell. I wanted to create the sensation of being lost in the head of this man."

Though ultimately heartbreaking, the play's inherent comedy creates a contrast that is important to Zeller. "Theatre tries to hold a mirror up to life, and life has that complexity, to be by turns joyful and tragic. It's [dementia] the saddest subject of our times, I think. But at the same time life carries on in a way that is surprising, joyful, cheeky."

Zeller isn't one to shy away from difficult subjects. He found fame in France in 2004 for his award-winning novel *La Fascination du Pire* (*The Fascination of Evil*) which explored the relationship between Islam and the West.

That was his third novel. He published his first, *Neiges Artificielles* (*Artificial*



MAIN PICTURE: Playwright Florian Zeller has enjoyed success on both sides of the Channel; FACING PAGE: Kenneth Cranham as André in *The Father*

Snow) aged just 22 after growing up “obsessed by writing”, he tells me in the serious, profound way he answers all my questions. “It wasn’t easy work, in the sense that you are constantly confronted by yourself and your limits, by everything that you can’t do. So it’s an internal fight which is sometimes violent.”

Though he had never been much of a theatregoer, when he was asked to write the libretto for an opera he discovered a world that was the antithesis of this inward-looking, solo struggle. “It was so mysterious, beautiful and joyful to work with other people that I started to become passionate about theatre,” he says. “I like to admire others, and I love actors. So the magic of theatre and my love for actors finally pushed me to write [a play].”

The result was *L’Autre*, which premiered in 2004. Since then he has written ten more plays – including the latest, relationship comedy *L’Envers du Décor*, which is currently playing at the Théâtre de Paris starring and directed by Daniel Auteuil – and only two more novels. Does he prefer playwriting now? “No, it’s not about one over the other.

{ ‘What I love about theatre is to be among many; it’s the fact of being able to hide oneself behind others; the writer is in the shadows’ }

They are adventures which have nothing to do with each other. What I love about theatre is to be among many, it’s the fact of being able to hide oneself behind others. Because in theatre the writer is in the shadows.”

In French productions of his plays, Zeller says he is usually in the rehearsal room “annoying everyone”, but for these British adaptations he kept firmly in the shadows by staying away from the rehearsal process. “I put myself in retirement a bit,” he says of *The Father*. “It’s necessary that the show is completely English. It’s not a question of language, it’s about an identity. It’s good that I am set apart from it, I think.”

It was vital, therefore, to have a native English translator, and he knew he was in good hands with Hampton. “I didn’t even read the translation much, I had so much confidence in him as a writer. He often came with me to advise on

decisions concerning the actors and all that. He became a sort of godfather.”

Clearly happy to leave the Brits to it, Zeller has enjoyed seeing the results of his work in their hands. Does the humour work the same way over here, I wonder? “Not exactly. It seems to me that in England there is something more playful, while French actors are perhaps more demonstrative, more Latin,” he says, before adding something that perhaps explains why his tragi-comic plays have touched audiences on both sides of *la Manche*: “But in the end, life is the same everywhere.” 🐼

● *The Father* is being staged at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London until 26 March before going on a UK tour until 14 May. The Truth plays at the Menier Chocolate Factory, London, from 10 March to 7 May (tel: 0207 378 1713, www.menierchocolatefactory.com)



CINEMA RELEASE

Disorder

Starring: Matthias Schoenaerts, Diane Kruger

Director: Alice Winocour

Certificate: 15

Running time: 98 minutes

Release date: 25 March



Throughout their careers, Matthias Schoenaerts and Diane Kruger have struggled to find roles that do justice to their obvious talent. Fortunately, they ran into Paris-born director Alice Winocour who, with tense thriller *Disorder*, gives the actors the opportunity to sink their teeth into a couple of strong roles.

Schoenaerts plays Vincent, a soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Put on suspension while the military carries out a psychological evaluation, he starts working as a security guard, keeping wealthy clients safe as they amble about at parties. Vincent lands a regular job on the French Riviera protecting the family of a shady Lebanese businessman and builds a strong bond with his pretty wife, Jessie (Kruger) and her son.

The former soldier soon realises that someone is out to harm the mother and her child. Or are they? With his worsening condition causing paranoia and panic attacks, it's difficult to know if Vincent is just imagining the threat or whether gunmen are really about to come through the door.

After being miscast as a romantic lead in a number of recent films, the Belgian actor is back on much firmer footing as a brooding, troubled anti-hero. He puts in an enigmatic turn that is low on dialogue but high on intensity, while Kruger, with limited screen time, brings depth to a woman who is trapped in a gilded cage. Winocour delivers a masterclass in subtle storytelling until the film's last third when *Disorder* goes from intriguing psychological thriller to generic home invasion drama. So strong are the central performances, though, that the film keeps its grip until the end.

Pierre de Villiers

OTHER NEW RELEASES

CINEMA

Marguerite (from 18 March) - When a wealthy socialite (Catherine Frot) is convinced by her husband and friends that she has a great singing voice, she decides to stage a high-profile concert, in this comedy, set in 1920s Paris.



The Sweeney: Paris (from 15 April) - Released in France as *Antigang*, this renamed police thriller reveals its debt to the classic 1970s British TV series starring John Thaw and the 2012 big-screen version with Ray Winstone. Action star Jean Reno plays the unscrupulous cop taking on organised crime bosses.

Five minutes with...

CAROL DRINKWATER

The **FRANCE Magazine** columnist and author of *The Olive Farm* series talks about the inspiration about her new book, *The Forgotten Summer* (see review, right), and her love of France and its lifestyle.



My French film-maker husband Michel has no plans to sell the olive farm in the south of France and so I quite fancied imagining what it would be like to own a vineyard. I visited Algeria on one of my trips and was haunted by the clusters of abandoned vineyards there, an experience that inspired my latest book.

It took two years to write as the story required vast amounts of research, particularly into the many different grape varieties. By the time I had finished, I felt as if I knew everything there was to know about the mourvèdre grape. My story is fictional, except for the love story between my main characters Luc and Jane, which reflects the deep love that my husband Michel and I have for one another.

I feel that I have captured the real sense of Provence in my work and in the future I'd like to move on to writing about France in a more

global sense. I love French history, so discovering more about its many quirky characters and the country's worldwide influence through its overseas territories also fascinates me.

I have lived in France for many years now and simply adore the lifestyle. I particularly enjoy how families always spend time together and how everyone, in some way, embodies a certain *joie de vivre*.

Carol Drinkwater was talking to Peter Stewart

We are listening to...

Tous les cris les SOS by French singer-songwriter Zaz. The lyrics (on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)) deal with a young boy's despair after his parents split up.

DVD

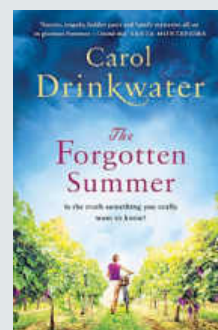
La Reine Morte (now available) - French choreographer Kader Belarbi's spectacular ballet, based on Henry de Montherlant's eponymous historical play, was originally created for the Ballet du Capitole in Toulouse and features music by Tchaikovsky.

BOOKS

The Forgotten Summer

Carol Drinkwater, Michael Joseph, £10

From best-selling author Carol Drinkwater comes a page-turning tale of secrets, forbidden love and heartbreak. When an accident destroys the crop at a family's vineyard in Provence and threatens financial ruin, Clarisse Cambon blames her English daughter-in-law Jane. The spat is the latest in a long-running feud between the women, who have never revealed the origins of their dispute to son and husband Luc, a documentary film-maker. However, when tragedy strikes and Jane has to manage the vineyard, she uncovers evidence to suggest that Luc might not be the man she fell in love with 30 years before - and the only person who knows the truth is her old enemy Clarisse. ★★★★★

**A Guide to Mystical France**

Nick Inman, Findhorn Press, £14.99

Travel writer and long-time resident of France Nick Inman delves into the mysteries and sacred sites that form part of the country's spiritual heritage. Themes covered in this illustrated guide range from pilgrimage routes and prehistoric cave paintings to sacred geometry and tarot. Destinations include Chartres Cathedral; the Pyrenean village of Rennes-le-Château, centre of numerous conspiracy theories; and hidden mountain sanctuaries. The list of characters is equally diverse, taking in the Knights Templar, Cathars, the astrologer Nostradamus and even King Arthur. ★★★★★

**Ladivine**

Marie NDiaye, MacLehose Press, £14.99 paperback

Clarisse Rivière refuses to tell her husband Richard and daughter Ladivine that her mother is a poor black housekeeper. She pretends to be an orphan and tells no one that her real name is Malinka and that she has been secretly visiting her mother. After her marriage breaks down, she soon finds a new man, but Ladivine senses something is not right about him. NDiaye, who won France's top literary award, the Prix Goncourt, in 2009 for *Three Strong Women*, delivers a powerful tale of secrets, lies and the legacy of shame. ★★★★★



KNOW YOUR OGNONS

Peter Stewart outlines the spelling reforms that have upset French purists

France is so proud of its language that members of the Académie Française meet regularly to discuss the harmful effects that Anglicisms and other words might be having on French. So it came as a shock when the government announced changes in spelling to simplify learning for younger children.

From the start of the academic year this September, more than 2,000 French words will be spelt differently in a reform that was approved by the academy in 1990, but never enforced.

Changes include deleting hyphens in some words and removing the circumflex accent (^), which sits on top of vowels to alter a word's pronunciation or to distinguish homonyms.

The circumflex will be dropped from 'i' or 'u', so long as the accent does not change the sense or pronunciation of the word, but it will stay on 'a', 'o' and 'e'. For example, 'coût' ('cost') and 's'entraîner' ('to practise') will become 'cout' and 's'entraîner' respectively.

Compound nouns such as 'mille-pattes', meaning 'centipede', and 'porte-monnaie',

meaning 'wallet', will become 'millepattes' and 'portemonnaie'.

Some spellings will be made more phonetic, so 'oignon' (onion) loses its 'i' to become 'ognon', and 'nénuphar' (water lily) turns into 'nénufar'.

Unsurprisingly, the reforms have caused huge controversy, with the daily newspaper *Le Parisien* calling them impossible to apply. Some social media users are so unhappy that

a #JeSuisCirconflexe (I am circumflex) hashtag has appeared on Twitter, with many labelling the reforms as the dumbing-down of a language that they spent years trying to master at school.

Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem has insisted

that the changes will not lead to the end of the beloved *accent circonflexe*, and that old and new spellings will both be correct.

The controversy is likely to rumble on for some time, but as the then 'perpetual secretary' (chairman) of the Académie Française, Maurice Druon, said when the reforms were approved in 1990: "Language is a living thing." He predicted that work would need to start again within 30 years.



THIS MONTH'S BEST PICKS

BEGINNERS

Easy Learning French Verbs, Collins, £7.99

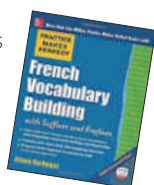
This comprehensive guide will help beginners to approach French verbs with confidence thanks to its clear format. The main section consists of 112 fully conjugated verbs, each of which is laid out over a double-page spread with major tenses and pronouns. The guide comes with idiomatic phrases for most verb models and an index of 2,000 commonly used verbs.



INTERMEDIATE

French Vocabulary Building with Suffixes and Prefixes, McGraw-Hill Contemporary, £10.99

This entry in the *Practice Makes Perfect* series contains 100 suffixes and 60 prefixes that can add 4,000 words to your vocabulary. Grammatical explanations and practice exercises help you to work out the meanings of unfamiliar terms through the beginning and endings of words.



ADVANCED

The Structure of Modern Standard French: A Student Grammar, Oxford University Press, £19.99

Combining traditional grammar with insights from modern linguistics, this book provides advanced students with a deep understanding of the principles behind the structure of French. It is particularly strong on showing how French and English grammar differ when used in similar contexts.



Read this... CLASSIC NOVEL

LES CAVES DU VATICAN

André Gide

Nobel Prize winner André Gide's satirical tale, first published in 1914, centres on a man who pushes someone off a train and must suffer the consequences. The story,

interrupted constantly by the narrator, moves through European capitals and involves everyone from pickpockets to a kidnapped Pope, but the plot strands are neatly tied up by the end. Through the format of a farce, Gide examines the pressures caused by family, society, law, religion and culture.



GRAMMAR CORNER

FALLOIR

'Falloir' is an irregular verb that expresses necessity and is well-known in its conjugated form as 'il faut'. As it is impersonal, it has only one grammatical person, the third person singular, and can be followed by an infinitive, subjunctive or noun.

An example of 'il faut' followed by a verb is 'il faut manger' ('you have to eat'). 'Il faut' goes well with the subjunctive, as in 'il faut que nous partions' ('we have to leave'). 'Il faut' followed by a noun can be seen in 'il faut du temps pour faire ça' ('you need time to do that').

When 'falloir' is followed by an infinitive or a noun it can be used with an indirect object pronoun, for example, 'il me faut une voiture' ('I need a car').

LONG LIVE THE ARTISAN

The French are proud of their arts and crafts trades, but the qualification rules are strict, says **Sophie Gardner-Roberts**

Il n'y a rien de plus satisfaisant que de créer quelque chose de ses propres mains et de voir ensuite l'admiration pour le travail accompli dans les yeux illuminés d'un observateur. C'est pourtant le quotidien pour les quelques trois millions d'artisans en France qui travaillent dur et contribuent chaque jour à la continuité d'une culture de l'artisanat local et du 'Fabriqué en France.'

Les français éprouvent effectivement une grande fierté que de pouvoir montrer une table en chêne et d'annoncer "ça, c'est fait chez l'artisan du coin." C'est probablement encore plus le cas aujourd'hui dans un contexte de mondialisation, où les entreprises délocalisent pour épargner sur les coûts de productions, et de crise financière où les métiers sont plus compromis que jamais.

Pourtant, l'artisanat est la 'première entreprise de France' comme rappelle le portail de l'Artisanat Français. Avec plus de 500 activités différentes dans les secteurs de l'alimentation, du bâtiment, de la production et des services, ce n'est pas étonnant que l'artisanat occupe une place aussi importante dans l'économie française.

Plus qu'un moteur économique, il s'agit surtout d'une transmission d'un savoir-faire et d'un métier uniques aux jeunes générations par le biais de l'apprentissage. Mais n'importe qui ne peut se prétendre artisan. Les règles sont strictes en France et un artisan doit justifier son titre avec un diplôme reconnu dans le métier exercé. Il faut se référer aux chambres des Métiers et de l'Artisanat et au Répertoire des Métiers qui regroupe tous les différents métiers artisanaux répertoriés.

Et puis il y a différents grades chez les artisans: le maître-artisan doit avoir dix années d'immatriculation au Répertoire des Métiers derrière lui, le maître d'apprentissage est reconnu pour ses qualités et qualifications pédagogiques et le titre d'artisan d'art est attribué à l'artisan dont l'activité est répertorié dans la classification des métiers d'art.

Tous les quatre ans, le concours des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France récompense les meilleurs ouvriers dans chaque métier et les artisans sont si bien respectés que la majorité des lauréats en sont. Parmi les noms des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France vous reconnaîtrez les chefs Joël Robuchon, Paul Bocuse et Michel Roux père.

There is nothing more satisfying than creating something with your own hands and then to see the admiration for the finished work in the eyes of an observer. Yet this is everyday life for the three million or so artisans in France who work hard and contribute every day to the continuity of a culture of local craftsmanship and of the 'Made in France' label.

Indeed, the French feel very proud when they are able to show off their oak table and say "See this? It's made by our local artisan." This is probably even more the case today in the age of globalisation, where companies are outsourcing to save on production costs, and of financial crisis where trades and crafts are jeopardised more than ever.

Yet, the Artisanat Français website reminds us that craft industries are 'France's first employer'. With more than 500 trades and activities in sectors such as food, construction, production

and services, it comes as no surprise that handicrafts play such an important place in the French economy.

More than an economic driver, it is about handing over a unique savoir-faire and craft to the younger generation through apprenticeships. But not anyone can claim to be an artisan. The rules are strict in France and an artisan has to justify their title with a diploma recognised by the trade in which they work. You have to refer to the relevant chamber of arts and crafts and the official directory that lists all the registered trades.

Then there are various positions within handicrafts: the *maître-artisan* has to have been registered with the trade directory for ten years; the *maître d'apprentissage* has to have teaching skills and qualifications; and the title of *artisan d'art* is given to those whose activity is listed in the artistic trades list.

Every four years, the *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* competition honours the best workers in a range of trades and industries, and artisans are so well regarded that they win the majority of the awards. Among the list of *Meilleurs Ouvriers de France*, you will recognise the names of chefs Joël Robuchon, Paul Bocuse and Michel Roux Snr. 🍷

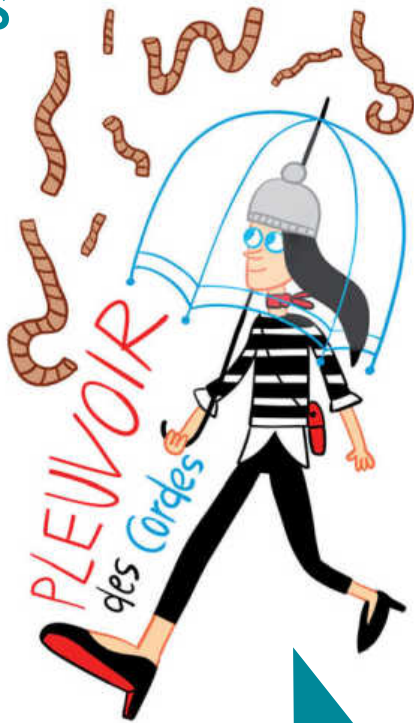


Word on the street:

'La téléloche' is a colloquial term for television. 'Hier soir j'ai maté la téléloche' means 'last night I watched the gogglebox'.



IDIOMS

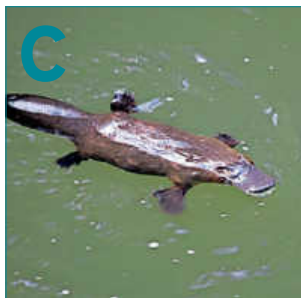
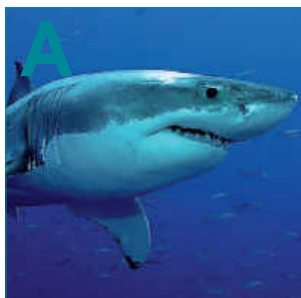


Guess the meaning of the idiom 'pleuvoir des cordes'.

- a) To show someone the ropes
- b) To rain cats and dogs
- c) To be soaked through

LES DEUX FONT LA PAIRE

Associez chacun des mots ci-dessous à son image



Phoque; Requin; Lamantin; Ornithorynque

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Make eating out easier with our glossary of restaurant terms, taken this month from a menu at La Vague d'Or in Saint-Tropez.

Les entrées

Tranche de foie gras de canard du sud-ouest truffé, confiture de figues et noisettes au Barolo, tranches de pain de campagne toastées à l'huile d'olive infusée de truffe

Cœur de saumon fumé impérial en fines tranches, **tarama blanc** et **arenkha** au citron vert, crème fermière et blinis



Les salades

Salade folle de foie gras, jambon cru de Sardaigne, **haricots verts** et petits légumes

Tranche épaisse de tomates multicolores cueillies plein champs, mozzarella de bufflonne servie entière **recouverte de** basilic, huile d'olive fruitée et fleur de sel



Les plats

Le paillard de veau au romarin, aubergine **grillée à l'âtre**, tomates et compotée d'oignons; **jus condimenté d'échalotes**, vinaigre de vin confidentiel

Côtes d'agneau grillées et **glacées au jus**, **cébettes à cru**, olives vertes et **sarriette**, jus de rôti au citron confit



Les desserts

La véritable **tarte tropézienne**, sorbet Mandarine

Soufflé glacé à la mandarine accompagné d'une liqueur de zestes de l'Abbaye de Lérins

tranche de foie gras de canard du sud-ouest truffé =

slice of duck foie gras from south-west France with truffles

tarama blanc = salted and cured roe mixed with olive oil and lemon juice

arenkha = a mixture of smoked herring, squid ink, lemon juice and spices

salade folle = a gourmet salad

haricots verts = green beans

tranche épaisse de tomates = thick slices of tomato

recouverte de = covered with

paillard de veau = a piece of veal which is pounded until thin and flat

grillée à l'âtre = grilled on a hearth

jus condimenté d'échalotes = meat juices flavoured with shallots

côtes d'agneau grillées = grilled lamb chops

glacées au jus = cooked in meat juice

cébettes à cru = raw spring onions

sarriette = the herb savory

tarte tropézienne = an egg-rich brioche filled with cream, said to have originated in Saint-Tropez in the 1950s

soufflé glacé à la mandarine = tangerine-flavoured ice-cream soufflé

Agneau
[An-yo]
Lamb



Fun French ANAGRAMS

Find the French words for kitchen items

- 1 Rèuiclle
- 2 Copceradéu Penlah
- 3 Qertiecuo
- 4 Pacsurdeulé
- 5 Pireasso
- 6 Touaceu

Answers

Idiom: A) To rain cats and dogs; B. Les deux font la paire; A) Requiem - shark; B. Lamentation - manatee; C) Ornithorynque - platypus;
D) Proche - seal; Anagramme: Cuillière
planche à découper - chopping board; conquêter – egg; coupeau - knife.
Find the quote: Passoire – sieve; écopateur – bottle opener; Passoire et je prend dans ses bras, Il me parle tout bas,
vous là vie en rose.” When he takes me his arms, and speaks to me softly,” I see the world through rose-tinted glasses” (Edith Piaf).



Mots Fléchés winner

The winner of the February Mots Fléchés quiz is Mr D. J. Kirkby, from Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire. The mystery town was Beauvais in the Oise *département*.

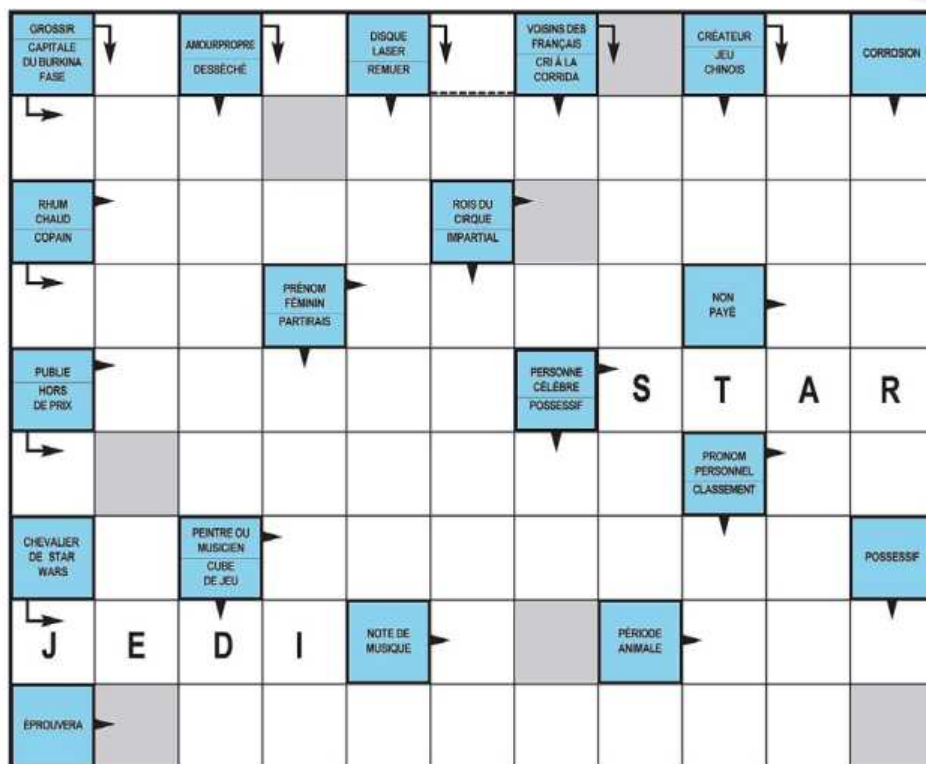
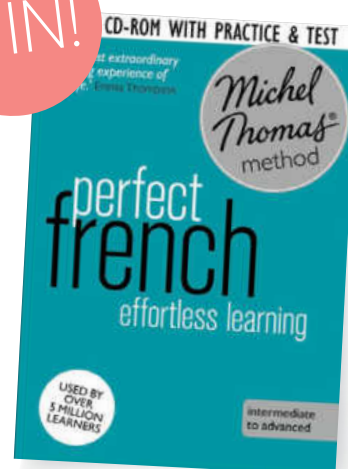
COMPETITION

Les Mots Fléchés

The winner of this month's competition will receive the *Michel Thomas Perfect French* CD-audio course, published by Hodder & Stoughton. It will help intermediates take their French to the next level and gain confidence without

books, writing or striving to memorise everything. The pack, which retails at £100, contains ten hours of audio learning on CD, more than three hours of extra vocabulary help, a visual learning review and interactive exercises.

WIN!



To enter: Complete Les Mots Fléchés grid and note all the letters in the grey squares. Rearrange these letters to spell a French town or city and send this answer, together with your name, telephone number and address, to: *FRANCE Magazine*, Les Mots Fléchés, Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1BB. Entries close 6 April 2016.

Last month's Les Mots Fléchés answers will be posted on our website www.francemag.com/quiz and appear in the May issue, on sale on 6 April 2016. The answers to this month's competition will be on the website from 13 April 2016, and in the June 2016 issue, on sale on 4 May 2016.

FIND THE QUOTE

Slice up the baguette where the slices should be to reveal lines from an Édith Piaf song

Quand il me prend dans ses bras il me parle tout bas je vois la vie en rose



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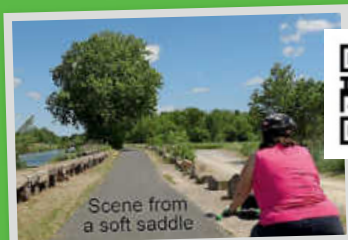
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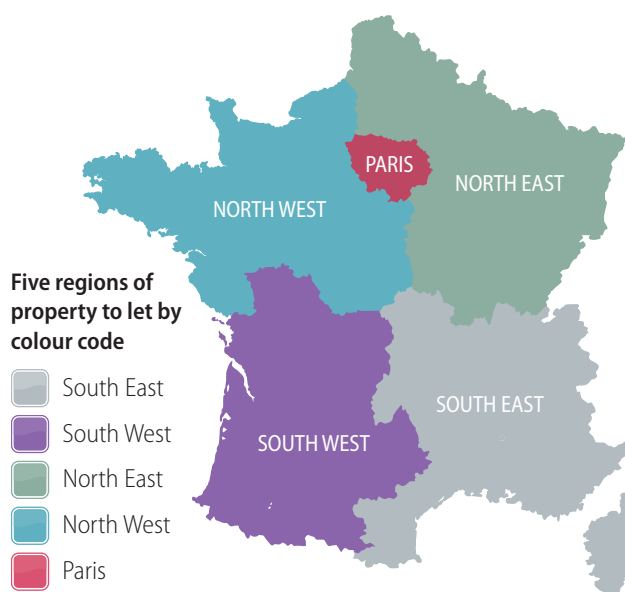
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KEY

- 1 Full colour picture
- 2 Département number
- 3 Nearest town
- 4 Département name
- 5 Sleeping capacity
- 6 Property description
- 7 Weekly rental range (in £ or €)
- 8 Contact details

Numbers 9 - 16 are distances in km, O/S for On-site and N/P for details Not Provided.

- 9 Nearest supermarket
- 10 Nearest airport
- 11 Nearest beach/swimming
- 12 Nearest tennis
- 13 Nearest golf
- 14 Nearest horseriding
- 15 Nearest restaurant
- 16 Nearest tourist attraction

COLLIOURE, PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES

CAPACITY: 2-4

This homely villa is in a quiet corner of a traditional village surrounded by countryside, vineyards and Les Albères mountains. The Mediterranean coast is 15 mins drive. St. Cyprien, Argelles sur mer, Canet plage all popular beach resorts. Collioure is a delight with cobbled lanes, artisan galleries and beach front restaurants. Visit Carcassonne, the wonderful UNESCO world heritage city. Drive along the beautiful rugged coast into Spain, visit vineyards, cathar castles and pretty harbour towns. Enjoy wine tasting, walking and sight seeing. You will feel relaxed as soon as you arrive at Belle Vue, with its simple stylish decor and the peaceful setting! Nearest airport Perpignan 20km.

€545-945 p/w

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Email: bellevuemaisonvilla@yahoo.co.uk
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Icons for: 9 Supermarket, 10 Airport, 11 Beach/swimming, 12 Tennis, 13 Golf, 14 Horseriding, 15 Restaurant, 16 Tourist attraction

PROPERTY IN THE NORTH WEST



50

NR CARTERET, NORMANDY

■ CAPACITY: 9

About 15mins drive from the coast and resorts of Barneville-Carteret, Portbail and the market towns of Briquebec and St Sauveur le Vicomte, each boasting their own Chateau. Mont St. Michel, historic D-Day sites and the Bayeux Tapestry are all within a 2 hour leisurely drive. Nearby villages have bakers and general stores.

The beaches are white and sandy, good for swimming, sailing, water-sports, horse-riding, golf plus plenty of bars, cafes and restaurants. The house itself is fully furnished with a well-equipped kitchen & dining room. (electric cooker, fridge, and freezer, washing machine, microwave, toaster).

Lounge with UK TV. There is a double bedroom and shower room, WC downstairs and upstairs a family room with en-suite bathroom and a triple room with a sink and shaver point. Heating throughout is by multi-fuel burners and electric radiators. The garden is a good size with terrace, picnic table and BBQ. Ample off-road parking. The house is well furnished and comes complete with linen..

£ 320-420 p/w

Contact
Tel: (01728) 688309
Email: norman.maison@gmail.com
www.normanmaison.co.uk



PROPERTY IN THE NORTH WEST



61

L'EPINAY LE COMTE

CAPACITY: 3

South facing well equipped stone detached bakehouse recently renovated. Open plan living/dining room kitchen with wood-burner, TV, DVD, radio, CD player and dedicated free WiFi. Well equipped kitchen inc. washing machine. Mezzanine bedroom with double bed and single futon. Bathroom with shower. The Bakehouse is part of a small gated complex of three buildings with generous gardens, hot tub and parking. Situated on a quiet lane off the D21 between Passais la Conception and L'Epinaie le Comte. Owners live on site. Excellent cycling opportunities. Three adult bicycles available. Plenty of walking and fishing in the area. Prices include gas, electricity and heating (wood for the woodburner) all bedlinen, towels and welcome tray. Mid-week breaks and weekend breaks available with flexible dates to suit your travel plans. Contact the owners for prices. Pets welcome.

£ 200-£300 p/w

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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH EAST



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06

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CAPACITY: 5

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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH EAST



66

PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES

■ CAPACITY: 2-4

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84

AVIGNON, VAUCLUSE, PROVENCE

■ CAPACITY: 2

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■ CAPACITY: 2-14

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NR. MAZAMET, MIDI-PYRENEES

■ CAPACITY: 2

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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH WEST



81

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PROPERTY IN THE SOUTH WEST



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HOW TO BE *French*

Stephen Clarke's expert tips for life in France

I have known lots of English speakers who have worked for French companies. Most of them have been very happy to do so, especially as it has given them the chance to sample the healthy French life-work balance, with its emphasis on lunch and holidays.

But I have often heard stories about them giving instructions to a French team, and getting the answer: "Why?"

If you are an American boss, more used to teams reacting with "yay, high five!" (well, that's what they always do in films), this French questioning of authority can come as a shock.

But there are two positives about this. Firstly, I was head of a team for a while, and quite honestly, I didn't always know what I was doing. Questioning me was the intelligent thing to do.

Secondly, authority is not the only thing the French question. They also question themselves.

Recently, I have done several media events on the subject of the French lifestyle. The funniest one was a radio interview, during which I was asked whether I thought the concept of '*le French lover*' was realistic.

I was surprised, to say the least. I had always thought that Frenchmen were brimming over with self-confidence about being the world's greatest seducers. And here they were, asking me – an Englishman – if I believed the hype.

I said that it might be wiser to ask a woman or a gay man – I personally have never been the object of a Frenchman's amorous attentions. What I could say, though, was that '*le French lover*' is a great brand, an image that lots of people believe in. It's like champagne, Chanel or Camembert – a traditional French export product.

An actor such as Jean Dujardin (star of *The Actor*) has, I argued, been hired by Hollywood because he fits the classic 'French lover' image. He is, in fact, a sort of human Camembert. The interviewer seemed quite pleased with this answer.

{ Authority is not the only thing the French question. They also question themselves



Stephen Clarke's new novel, *Merde in Europe*, is out in May. As Britain debates whether to leave the European Union, an Englishman goes to work in Brussels, with potentially catastrophic results.



I also spoke at a conference on the subject of '*le Made in France*'. (It's funny that they give these French concepts English names, as if they are acutely aware that it's all about exporting the brand worldwide.) There, I listened mainly to food manufacturers talking about their top-quality, locally grown, highly natural produce.

I was invited to give them my view. Products labelled '*Made in France*', I said, are usually regarded by us English-speakers as either chic or craftsman-made, or both. French products seem to

belong to one of two groups: the champagne/Michelin-star clique, or the we've-been-doing-this-since-the-dawn-of-time clan. We buy into French people's sense of style, their expertise, and their fondness for things that taste or smell as if nature invented them and generously donated them to France.

The most surprising thing was that neither of these events was self-congratulatory. My hosts, both on the radio and at the conference, seemed to be throwing themselves open to debate. "Are we right to be doing things this way?" they were asking. "Do people like what we do?"

What I liked most (apart from the samples of food given out at the conference) was the very fact that they were asking these questions. It's not something you would naturally assume about, for example, a well-dressed *Parisien* or *Parisienne* as they sit in a traditional brasserie, tucking into a mound of fresh seafood with a glass of champagne. But somewhere beneath that smooth surface, there will be waves of doubt.

Of course, you could interpret it as not knowing when you are well off, but I prefer to see it as a throwback to ancient times, when the Gauls were terrified that the sky would fall on them. Is nothing certain, they're wondering, even with a glass of champagne in your hand? That's a pretty profound question. 🍷

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